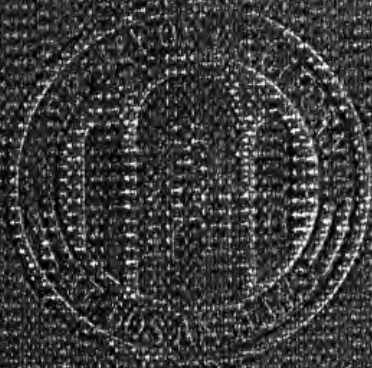
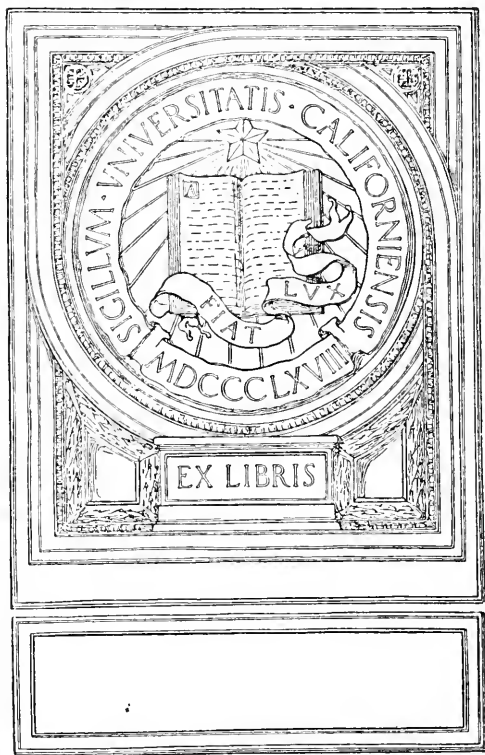


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THE ITALIAN POETS  
SINCE DANTE



# THE ITALIAN POETS SINCE DANTE

ACCOMPANIED BY VERSE TRANSLATIONS

BY  
WILLIAM EVERETT

14268

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
1904

Jan. 1906

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ILLIUS MEMORIAE  
 E CUNCTIS AUSONIAE POETIS  
 QUEM OMNES QUI EI SUCCESSERUNT  
 PRINCIPEM REVERENTER SALUTAVERUNT  
 PVBLI VERGILI MARONIS  
 HAEC FOLIA HUMILLIME  
 INSCRIBUNTUR

“TU SE’ LO MIO MAESTRO”





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## PREFACE

THE following pages formed a course of lectures delivered at the Lowell Institute in Boston in the spring of 1904. No attempt has been made to recast them in a less rhetorical form.

They do not profess to be exhaustive. Many notable poets are omitted altogether; and of those who are handled many important works are passed over. It seemed that Chiabrera, for instance, might fairly be left out; and that if the "Orlando Furioso" were thoroughly discussed, the other poems of Ariosto need not be. If what is said about the poets named in these pages shall lead lovers of Italian to read those who are not, the author will be specially satisfied.

The reader will look in vain for evidences of profound original research, or subtlety of analytic criticism. The object is avowed at the outset to arouse a desire to be acquainted at first hand with a renowned body of literature, which is less read than it has been, and ought to be. The biographical notices are drawn from the most familiar sources, and the poems have been handled as they stand, without anxious effort to detect any *Tendenz* or *Zeitgeist* in their construction. The author believes that it is equally vain to regard a great poetic genius as the mere product of his age, and to attribute to him an elaborate philosophy of compo-

sition, which would go far to destroy—and with some poets has all but destroyed—the spontaneous outpouring of his song. One thing is claimed for these lectures: the poems themselves have been read entire and in their native text. If the views appear mistaken or their presentation dubious, they are yet the result of reading the authors, of which there is now far too little, and not of studying them, of which there is now far too much.

The translations are for the most part original. Direct acknowledgment is made in all cases where others' versions have been used. The author is convinced, and has endeavored to establish his conviction by examples, that a poet's meaning may be preserved with entire fidelity, while equal respect is paid to his metrical form and harmony. The first essential of poetry is attractive and musical form; and if this is slighted by the author, or discarded by the translator, the result is not poetry, however poetical the ideas may be. For a translator to offer a great poem in prose dress seems like a contradiction in terms; and it is not much better when some metrical form is adopted essentially alien to the original's. To reduce a sonnet of Petrarch to a mere string of fourteen lines not rhymed at all, or rhymed anyhow, is untrue to the poet, whatever it may be to his matter.

At the same time the paraphrase, where the translator rewrites a poem to adapt it to what he fancies a pleasing metrical form, is equally uncalled for. In some cases, like Pope's "*Iliad*," or Dryden's "*Æneid*," where the metre of the original appeared to their authors impossible in English—and who shall

say they were wrong?—the genius of these great men has given us two noble poems, which afford pleasure even to those who know the originals, and are an invaluable possession to those who think the originals inaccessible. But in the hands of translators of less original powers the result is apt to be painful—as in Boyd's contemptible version of Petrarch's "Trionfi."

The versions in this volume attempt to attain the double fidelity,—fidelity to matter and fidelity to form,—without which a translation is either dry or loose, instead of being at once firm and sweet. It will perhaps prove not an uninteresting task for lovers of the originals to search for the passages rendered.

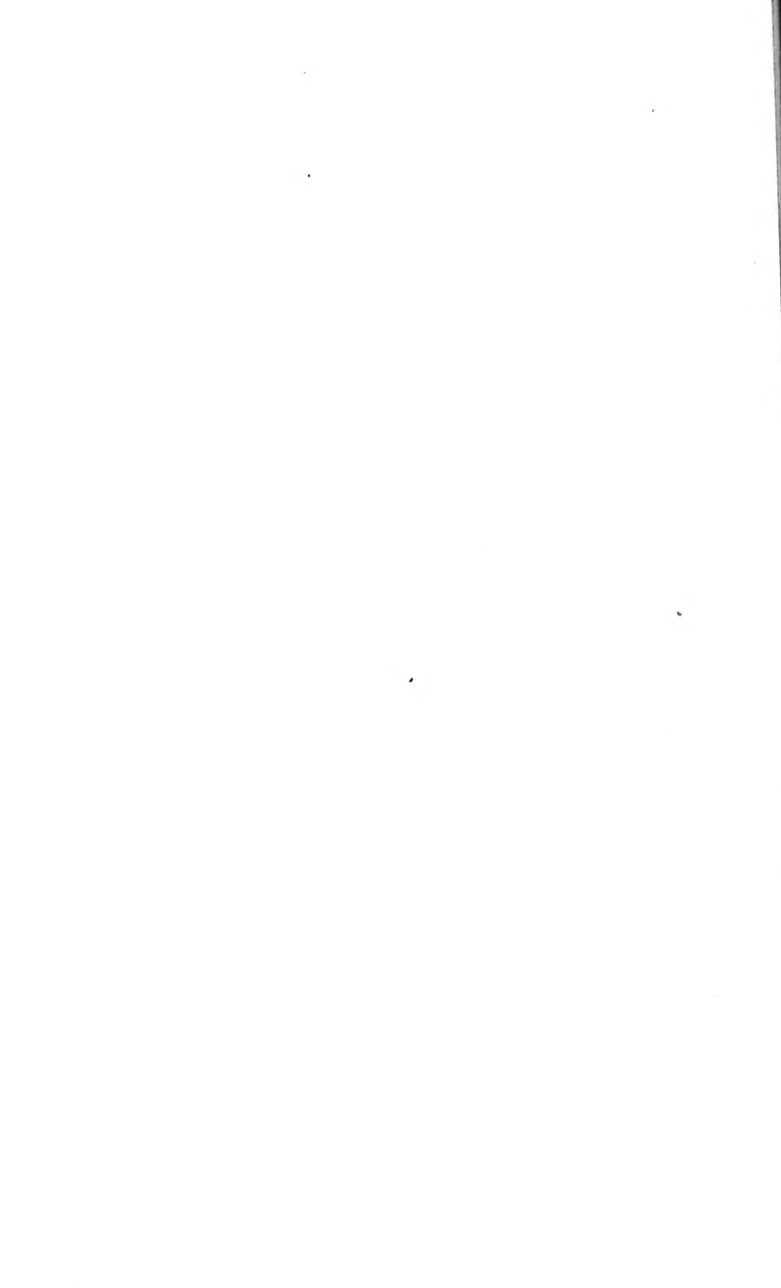
For a free expression of opinion on the writings of other than Italian poets, even when these are directly at variance with modern views, the author has no apology to offer.

It would be unpardonable not to render a special acknowledgment of gratitude to Professor Charles Eliot Norton, the stores of whose unequalled acquaintance with Italian literature have been on all occasions most kindly and sympathetically at the author's disposal.

QUINCY, October, 1904.



**THE ITALIAN POETS  
SINCE DANTE**





# THE ITALIAN POETS SINCE DANTE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION—PETRARCH

14268

IN announcing a course of lectures on Italian poetry, I feel I am undertaking a subject interesting enough to charm any audience and vast enough to sober any writer. The poets of Italy formed a brilliant galaxy led by stars of the first magnitude before Chaucer had written a line of the "Canterbury Tales"; in the long interval between Chaucer and Spenser, when English poets were below mediocrity, Italy again presented bards of distinguished talent in almost every line of poetry, and their new leaders might rank with the leaders in any tongue. These had been the inspiration of Milton, who might fairly be called their direct successor, when in Italy itself the succession had grown dim and cold; yet Italian genius of a high order was not wanting in the days of Dryden. Imprisoned yet over-fed, it still gave out noble flashes in the days of

Gray and Goldsmith. It burst forth with a lustre worthy of its best ages in the days when Cowper and Burns were rousing British poetry from its sleep, and the last century has given birth to poets worthy to rank with Dante and Petrarch, with Ariosto and Tasso, with Filicaja and Alfieri.

And there have been times when the vast power and beauty of Italian poetry were fully recognized, and made it the favorite study of cultivated men and women. I use this last word advisedly. It is certain that of all the great departments of pure literature, there is none which men and women have enjoyed on such equality as the poetry of Italy. All the Italian poets, great and small, write for women as much as for men: they constantly appeal to ladies for their judgment and sympathy; they treat them with all the respect which ancient Rome showed to her matrons. The very first words of Ariosto's mighty epic, so dear to the heart of all Italians, are "the ladies."

But Italian poetry is not now studied as it was. The language holds by no means the same place in our courses of study as the German, which was little more than a collection of uncouth dialects centuries after Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio had made their tongue the vehicle of the loftiest, the tenderest, and the wittiest ideas. Many men and women would be ashamed to confess ignorance of Heine and Uhland, of Victor

Hugo and Verlaine, who would see no disgrace in admitting that Guarini and Alfieri, Leopardi and Carducci were sealed books to them. When Byron dubbed the language "that soft bastard Latin," he expressed the view which many persons who claim literary and linguistic culture hold about Italian.

One poet of Italy, it is true, is by no means neglected. The greatest of all her stars is observed and studied to the strange exclusion of all the other luminaries in her sky. Dante is probably more read and analyzed and commented on now than he was in the days when Petrarch and Ariosto and Tasso were great favorites. We may cheerfully grant that Dante is the greatest Italian poet, one of the greatest among all poets. There are those who set him—I am not one—at the head of creative writing. But he is not the whole even of Italian poetry, any more than Homer is all of Greek, Goethe all of German, or Shakespeare all of English. It would be absurd if a Frenchman or a Spaniard should study a grammar and a book of extracts with the resolve to proceed at once to "Faust" or "Hamlet," and, having read them, to read no more German or English, neither Schiller nor Heine, neither Milton nor Scott; and even a slight knowledge of later poets will show that Dante himself needs for his true understanding some acquaintance with his successors.

It appears to me, therefore, that the present estimate

and study of Dante, even if not above the claims of that poet himself, has resulted in an inexcusable neglect of his successors. Granting that any study of Italian literature to be valuable must include Dante,—granting that the eighteenth-century scholars who set him aside as barbarous and unintelligible were fatally wrong,—I still venture to say that to begin the study of Italian literature with the “*Divina Commedia*” is an error—an error akin to that sometimes committed in our schools by beginning the study of English literature with Chaucer. Few authors are harder than Dante, and by studying the easier ones the gulf of six centuries may be abridged, and the student saved from leaping its whole width.

Reflecting, therefore, how much study is already given to Dante among ourselves,—how he could not be exhausted in eight or eighty lectures if I began with him,—I believe I shall handle my subject of Italian poets best if I leave him in his mighty shrine, where he will always stand by himself, whatever names we may couple with his, and ask your attention to his successors—a constellation which, but for the overpowering blaze of that one star, would be reckoned of surpassing brilliancy.

But even after declining the serious burden of the “*Divine Comedy*,” I feel the weight of my task scarcely lessened, and I approach it with unfeigned

diffidence. Everything Italian is fascinating; but its charm is like a tropical forest,—its luxuriance is almost deadly; its very beauties will strangle and poison an incautious explorer. There is no moment in the ages at which we can gaze on Italy that she does not overwhelm us by her countless treasures of beauty and of sadness, and defy us to exhaust them. In the days before history, in the days of mythology and legend, in those of classic antiquity, of feudal struggles, of the revival of learning and at the same time of foreign oppression,—in the more modern centuries when she awoke from her sleep and resumed her place among the nations, there is not in Italy a name of river, of mountain, of city, of man or woman that does not awaken more memories and more hopes than a single mind can hold. Her night blazes with more stars, her day glows with more hues, her ground sends up at every tread more flowers and more weeds, her sea gleams with a deeper azure, than any other land's. The most cruel torture cannot exhaust her patience or quench her genius. In the days of frivolous heathenism, Raphael saw the Virgin's smile; in the days of superstition, new worlds revealed themselves to Galileo; in the days of heartless formulæ, Beccaria raised the criminal from the dust; in the days when all thought seemed dead, Galvani and Avogadro revolutioned science; in the days of tricky diplomacy,

Garibaldi broke the chains of Sicily. That man has no heart and little reason whom her glories do not at once guide and thrill; that man does not know himself who fancies he has fathomed her secrets. As full of enchanting beauty as Greece in her prime, of bewitching horror as Germany under her barons, of ecstatic hopes as America to-day,—past or future, she is queen of nations.

I do not for a moment claim the knowledge needed to discuss the many questions that arise in connection with the Italian poets, or disentangle all their relations to each other and their respective ages. My aim is to revive, perhaps to create, an interest in a wonderful set of writers far too little read; to bring before you some of their principal traits and finest passages; to induce you, if I can, to read them yourselves. And for this work I claim one qualification. The sound of their beautiful language has rung in my ears from my very earliest infancy. On the sacred soil of Florence and Fiesole, before my memory of events begins, I drank in the music of Tuscan equally with the notes of my own tongue. I can remember no hour when everything Italian was not set before me as a source of supreme interest. Many here know Italy better than I do; none but a native can love her more.

If we begin our survey, then, with another than the greatest name, there is no doubt what that first name

shall be. In the year 1304, the third of Dante's banishment, there was born to one of his fellow-exiles, in the Tusean city of Arezzo, a child who became known as Francesco Petrarca. According to Dante, the men of Arezzo were nothing but snappish curs, whereas in Florence the breed had turned to wolves; but a nobler and gentler strain was the inheritance of "Francis Petrark, the laureat poete," as he is called by Chaucer, who knew him well. No poet of Italy has had more influence on his countrymen, or has been hailed by them as more completely a model of thought and style.

The parents of Petrarch moved from Arezzo to Pisa, where his education began at an early age; and then, finding no hope of restitution to their rights as Florentine citizens, they passed to Avignon on the lower Rhone, a city destined to influence mankind in general, and Petrarch in particular, far beyond its natural claims to distinction.

The state of Italy in Petrarch's lifetime might be called exeeptionally distressing, were it not that misfortune has so uniformly haunted that country from century to century that any particular era of suffering can only be looked upon as one stage in an almost unbroken course of woe. Italy was seething with life; art, literature, discovery were making rapid strides. But her strong and wealthy cities were all torn by

hostile factions, ready one after another to fall into the hands of some despot or oligarchy, and positively courting the ruinous help of conquerors. Dante was dreaming of a glorious universal kingdom under the two heads of the pope and the emperor. The dream in both its parts had scarcely an element of fact or expediency to grow from. In Petrarch's childhood mighty things were expected of the new emperor, Henry of Luxembourg, who came down into Italy only to find a fruitless crown on his head, and a barren sceptre in his gripe, and to die after two years, it was said by poison, having carried fire and sword from Milan to Naples without making a single real conquest. Nor did any of his successors reëstablish the sway over Italy which had been called the special desire of Heaven. Still less was the pope doing anything for the Latin country and people. About the time when Italy was dreading the emperor's arrival, Pope Clement V was persuaded by King Philip the Fair of France to leave Rome altogether and move his seat to Avignon, a transaction on which Dante pours out the bitterest vials of his never moderate wrath. However it may have injured Rome or Italy, or the Church in its higher interests, we cannot doubt that Avignon was a far more eligible place of residence at this time than the Eternal City, rent as that was by the feuds of rival houses. The charming and cultivated



Provence, really another country than France, offered in its classical towns every attraction of nature or art. Here Petrarch was carefully educated in the science of the law, the only lucrative occupation open to one who did not care to be a soldier, a farmer, or a merchant,—the law meaning chiefly the canon law, which connected its practitioner with the Church. The boy, however, was early drawn away from his professional training by his passion for studying the great Latin writers, which his father seems to have regarded much as we do dime novels, throwing his son's books into the fire, from which only Francesco's tears rescued his dear Cicero and Virgil.

He passed from the University of Montpellier to that of Bologna. At the age of twenty he lost his father, and finding, like Demosthenes, that his estate was virtually ruined by unfaithful guardians, he returned to make Avignon his home. His talents, his learning, his industry, and his charm of manner attracted friends constantly, and he became known to many members of the Papal Court, especially two brothers of the illustrious Roman house of Colonna, whose intercourse inspired him with a new love for his native country, and to whom he looked for the regeneration of Rome, and ultimately of Italy. Through them he received preferment as a cathedral canon—a position not involving the religious duties now be-

longing to it. But the controlling influence of his life came from another source.

In April, 1327, he saw for the first time, at early morning service on Good Friday, Laura de Noves, the wife of Hugh de Sade, and immediately conceived a passion for her which henceforth dominated his whole existence. We may accept Petrarch's statement that she possessed every grace of body and mind, and that a poet of twenty-three should pour out his whole heart to her is not strange. Nor would it have been strange if, in the atmosphere of Languedoc, laden with gallantry much more than virtue, Laura had responded to his passionate appeals. But this is exactly what did not happen, and Petrarch's love, the love of a very susceptible man, was transformed into a still stronger flame of respect, the admiration of a very high-minded man, who had the keenest perception of everything noble in literature or life. After trying in vain first to crown and then to stifle his love, he travelled over many parts of France and the neighboring countries, but returned to bury himself in the lovely retreat of Vacluse, a few miles from Avignon, in the valley of the Sorgue. Here he began to pour forth those love songs and sonnets which made their way everywhere that love and poetry bore sway, and Petrarch became celebrated in an age of great men, in Italy of course more than anywhere else.

He was roused in his retreat by the call of Pope John XXII on all Christian peoples to unite in a new crusade. The fiery response which Petrarch made to his appeal induced him to send the poet on a mission to Rome. But Petrarch was made sick at heart by what the world's capital revealed to him, and returned to his beloved Vacluse, whence he filled all Europe with the melodious tale of his love and his visions. In spite of Dante's preference of the "vulgar tongue," that is, Italian, to Latin as a vehicle for his thoughts, the feeling still lingered in Italy that the language of Virgil and Horace was the true medium for poetry. The sonnets and other poems of Petrarch operated with resistless force to dispel this feeling. Since his century, many Italians of talent and some of genius have written Latin verses; but the nation as a whole has seen that its own natural tongue contains within itself resources for every strain of poetry, from the loftiest epic to the gayest banquet song or the bitterest satire. Yet Petrarch himself was slow to perceive this truth, and in the very hour when his Italian poems were sending his own and his lady's name over Italy from Milan to Palermo, he conceived that his life's work should be to compose a Latin poem on Africa, of which the hero was Scipio Africanus. But in any language his genius had now stamped itself on his age, and he was invited by the body which still called itself the

Roman Senate to come to the city and receive a laurel crown. Such a proposal could hardly be refused; but Petrarch declared he must first be examined, and he betook himself to Naples, where King Robert, with only an equivocal reputation as a soldier and a ruler, enjoyed the highest fame as a patron of letters. The poet was duly examined by the king, who set his seal on the worth that the world was recognizing, and Petrarch, going to Rome, was drawn in splendor "through the bellowing Forum and round the Suppliants' Grove up to the everlasting gates of Capitolian Jove," to receive the laurel of a purer and loftier triumph than Camillus or Cæsar or his hero Scipio had won for their blood-stained conquests. He went back to Vacluse, where he maintained his retreat for a few more years. But he often crossed the Alps into Italy, which, as he grew older, became dearer and dearer to him. He had won such a vast number of friends that he found constant occupation in the vain effort to bring better times to Italy, and restore something like unity and dignity to the nation. Now it was a luxurious and self-seeking pope whom he tried to win back to Rome; now it was his friend the fiery tribune Rienzi, for a brief moment the regenerator of the Eternal City, whom Petrarch upheld in his hour of triumph, even though he had slaughtered his friends the Colonnas, and again for whom in his time of ruin

he in vain begged the mercy of his conquerors; now it was a worthless German emperor whom Petrarch hoped, as Dante had his predecessor of half a century before, to arouse to some sense of his imperial position; now it was the court of the youthful Joanna of Naples, which his gratitude to her father made him try to fire with some spark of nobility and purity: all in vain!

He had sung the praises of Laura for more than twenty years, and had borne her image unchanged in his breast at home and abroad, in company and alone, through glory and through intrigue, when western Europe was assailed by the Black Death, that mysterious pestilence which swept away an immense portion of every people,—the same which Boccaccio has commemorated in the *Decameron*. To this, in 1348, Laura succumbed, twenty-one years to a day since her features had captured his heart. This blow, though sad premonitions of it had come over him more than once, did not for a moment remove Laura's image from the heart of Petrarch, but it chastened and elevated his love, and gave his poems written after her death a far higher tone than those of his earlier life.

This sobering effect was helped by his visit, in 1350, to the jubilee at Rome; a ceremony still replete with dignity and feeling, though the pontiff who should have directed it was lounging and intriguing hundreds of miles away. For the rest of Petrarch's life the

youthful follies and the waywardness of early manhood were at an end; his mind, always susceptible to religious emotion, turned more and more to higher concerns; and this impulse had its noblest work in reclaiming from wild frivolity to a sense of better things his illustrious friend Boccaccio.

It would be unprofitable, were it possible, to follow the poet along the last twenty years of his life. They were passed almost entirely in Italy, chiefly in the cities of the north, where he was always received with honor. In due time the sentence of exile against his name was reversed, and he was able to visit Florence, which he had always looked on as his native city, with dignity and pleasure. Yet it is a sad thought that, received with distinction in every city, he could not retain a permanent home in any, the miserable factions, supported by mercenary bands, vying with each other to render any residence unsafe for any great man. The death of Petrarch occurred at Arquà, near Padua, where he was found dead, his head resting on a book, on the 18th of July, 1374.

To estimate Petrarch aright, we must look at him in three aspects: First, as an Italian patriot, who tried to bring all the various forces which controlled her fate into harmonious and honorable union, he ranks with the very noblest of those who have illustrated her history. When we consider some of the greatest of

his brother poets and patriots in that regard,—when we think of the ferocity of Dante, who assuredly would have served his enemies as they served him if he had prevailed,—or, at a time far removed from his, when we think of the aristocratic republicanism of Alfieri, who despised the house of Savoy, whence regeneration was to come to Italy, as much as he hated the democracy of France, which alone could check her foreign tyrants even for an instant, Petrarch rises above them both in generosity and in wisdom.

Again, Petrarch, entirely aside from his poetry, deserves perhaps the highest place among the revivers of learning. He was diligent in searching out all the remains of ancient literature that still lay in monastic libraries; he culled their choicest flowers for the instruction of the people; he insisted that the Muses should not be silent among arms. He befriended Boccaccio; he inspired Chaucer; he made literature to be honored in his own person with a glory surpassing pope or emperor; and he did what every wise man does who gets the chance,—learned Greek, at an age when fools stop learning anything.

Men have long been taught to think the great hero of the middle of the fourteenth century was Edward the Black Prince, a man who was the type of chivalry to a royal prisoner, but the type of savagery to revolted subjects. If any one thinks the glory of Crécy

and Poitiers and Navarrete is superior to that of the coronation in the capital, he has yet to learn that peace hath her victories not less but more renowned than those of war.

But it is as an Italian poet that Petrarch chiefly concerns us now. Of his immense influence on the language and literature of Italy the evidence is plain, and the estimate can hardly be exaggerated. He fixed the language of Italian poets in words, in phrases, in form, in tone. It is said—and as far as a foreigner can judge it is true—that there is no word in Petrarch which is not in good use to-day. To understand what this means, we have only to consider how it seems to us now to read Chaucer, who was later than Petrarch by a whole generation. Nor is it hard to define the nature of this influence and the tone given by him to Italian poetry. The leading traits are two—sweetness and tenderness—melodious expression and sympathetic thought. The verse of Petrarch stands that criterion which an old-fashioned lover of verse adheres to in spite of all modern theories of deliberate harshness and forced rhythm: it reads or rather sings itself. You cannot pronounce the words without falling into the melody. It is song; and throughout all Petrarch's volume called "*Canzoniere*" one feels that the terms *lyre* and *lute* and *harp* are his by right, as of the bards of old.



There are in this volume three hundred and seventeen sonnets and forty-nine *canzoni*, or odes, of greater or lesser length; these last are subjected to rules of rhyme as complicated and artful as are the sonnets. There are, finally, six poems in the measure of Dante's great poem, called the Triumphs of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Divinity. Three fifths of the volume were composed during Laura's life, and the remainder after her death; the great majority of the poems, in whatever form, are founded upon Petrarch's passion; very few of the sonnets are on any other theme.

On the value of the sonnet as a form of poetry there have been endless discussions, which seem to me profitless. A form of composition which Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth used freely cannot be despised by critics of English poetry. But the Italians from Dante down have more than adopted it: it is incorporated in the very being of their poetry; and whoever finds sonnets unattractive or repulsive to him is out of tune with the whole genius of Italian poetry. This form of Italian poetry may be said to have had its rules fixed by Petrarch.

The ingenuity which he put into these little poems is beyond praise. Every sonnet has its own single theme; yet into the fourteen lines are worked abundant illustrations, for which an inferior poet would

need three times as many. Every word seems to fall into its right place of itself, and it needs a very close examination to detect the infinite art of the construction. In many of them there are evidence of passion and devotion: a great wave of feeling has swelled up in the poet's heart; it must have vent, and it breaks out in these burning lines. But often the very cleverness seems inconsistent with real passion. It seems incredible that a man who was really frozen, chilled, and heartbroken by his lady's haughtiness, or in time really became healed of his wounds by her graciousness, should be able to set down and analyze with such an exact and precise choice of words the rays of the double sun which burned him, the hardness of the snowy marble that chilled him, and the verdure of the laurel which is his lady's namesake—an evergreen which flourishes so perennially in his writings that it becomes positively withered for very greenness and, one longs to say, turns to a chestnut. For we must admit in Petrarch a sameness of ideas and phrases which his wonderful skill in rearranging them cannot conceal. The same images, the same words, the same rhymes constantly recur; and when he tells us that Laura has cast over him a net which he can never disentangle, we see what he means by the way he tells it.

The *canzoni*, or odes, are far more remarkable than the sonnets. Even in them Petrarch imposes upon him-

self the trammels of complicated rhymes; and though the lines are of unequal lengths, the curious interlocking of the endings sometimes makes an ode resemble a succession of sonnets. But the whole plan of these poems is more generous: not only the canvas is wider, but the themes are larger, the imagination is bolder, the fancy is richer; whereas the sonnets, at their best elegant, are often only pretty and sometimes mean, the odes are beautiful and thrilling, sometimes noble and even sublime. When Laura is the subject, there is, in spite of occasional fantasticalities, a deeper strain of devotion than in the neat epigrams of fourteen lines where love seems decked out for a fancy ball.

There is in both sets of poems, if I am not greatly mistaken, a steady elevation of sentiment. There is first the wayward and wanton complaint of a mere lover; then comes the reluctant confession that the lady is of nobler temper than he had dreamed, and worthy of his respect; then a determination that he will in turn win her respect by making her name glorious; then he wakes to the consciousness that he can best win her respect, not by what he does, but by what he is, and making her nature a model for his own.

Then comes the stroke of Laura's death; there is for a little while the agony of separation, and the longing to end a life which is but death without her; but soon

she begins to return to him in the visions of the night, leading him to higher things, and making him consecrate his life, not to her, his lady, but to the Lord of all of whom she is the messenger.

A small but very notable portion of the poems are not concerned with Laura at all. They are on the ever exciting, ever hopeful, ever sad theme of Italy; and never in all the long line of Italian poets from Ennius to Carducci have the sufferings and hopes of Italy aroused a bard to appeals more manly yet more tender to her and her leaders to break off their lethargy and rise to their duty. Not Virgil nor Horace, not Lucan nor Juvenal, not Dante nor Filicaja has struck with a bolder hand or a finer touch the "chosen chords of gold" which are to vibrate in the ears of the frivolous, the slothful, the selfish, the criminal rulers to whose control fate has intrusted the loveliest of lands.

The Triumphs which conclude the volume form a species of allegory in six pictures. Petrarch has a vision of Love riding in his car, dragging in his train an endless line of captives, including the most illustrious of old, whose names he recounts, glorying to think he is of their band, and that they have suffered as he does. Then comes the Triumph of Chastity, the victory over passion of another great band, of whom Laura of course is the brilliant leader. But even she and the other noble matrons must yield to Death. He in turn

finds his conquest nullified by the Triumph of Fame. But over Fame in the end will triumph Time, who subdues all things. The only lasting victory is that of the Eternal Father, who annihilates even Time and gives his dutiful subjects an everlasting crown. All these poems, written in Dante's *terza rima*, exhibit much of the lofty thought and unyielding tread of the master, tempered by a gentleness which was the peculiar gift of the pupil.

Petrarch is extremely difficult to translate, partly from the complexity of the rhymes, which it is equally hard to transfer and fatal to disregard; and even if this difficulty be surmounted or evaded, there remains in the very structure of the poems that subtlety whereby art concealing art baffles the translator. Petrarch was a devoted admirer of Virgil, and drew from him the secret of making language and thought interdependent, so that not a word can be changed, dropped, or added to the former without injuring the latter. I give a variety of specimens, all from inadequate versions.

In sum we must hold that Petrarch was a very great man and a very great poet, who ranks in his best work with the kings of song, and on whose inferior work it is far easier to pronounce a general sentence than a specific condemnation of given parts. He is the noble progenitor and director of a noble line of bards.

The opening sonnet, addressed to his readers, is as follows—it is from Lord Charlemont's translation, slightly altered:

Ye who in rhymes dispersed the echoes hear  
Of those sad sighs with which my heart I fed  
When early youth my mazy wanderings led,  
Fondly diverse from what I now appear,  
Fluttering 'twixt frantic hope and frantic fear,  
From those by whom my various style is read,  
I hope, if e'er their hearts with love have bled,  
Not only pardon, but perhaps a tear.  
But now I clearly see that of mankind  
Long have I been the tale; whence bitter thought  
And self-reproach with frequent blushes teem;  
While of my frenzy shame the fruit I find,  
And sad repentance; and the proof, dear bought,  
That the world's joy is but a fleeting dream.

His blessing on everything connected with Laura  
(Lady B. Dacre).

Blest be the year, the month, the hour, the day,  
The season and the time, and point of space,  
And blest the beauteous country and the place  
When first of two bright eyes I felt the sway:  
Blest the sweet pain of which I was the prey  
When newly doomed Love's service to embrace,  
And blest the bow and shaft to which I trace  
The wound that in my inmost heart found way;  
Blest be the ceaseless accents of my tongue,  
Unwearied breathing my loved lady's name;  
Blest my fond wishes, sighs and tears and pains;  
Blest be the lays wherein her praise I sung,  
That on all sides have won for her fair fame;  
And blest my thoughts! For over all she reigns.

To his friend Colonna, inviting him to Vacluse.  
The play on Colonna (column or pillar) cannot be given in English, as is often the case with *Lauro* and *Laura*.

Glorious Colonna! thou the pillar dear  
Of all our hope, and the great Latin name,  
Whom windy shower or Jove's infuriate flame  
Hath never made from the true path to veer.  
No palace, theatre, nor arches here  
But in their stead the beech, the fir, the pine,  
Where one may wander versing, or recline.  
'Twixt the greensward and the fair mountain near,  
Bid from the earth to heaven our spirits soar,  
And nightingales, who sweetly to the shade  
Throughout the night their lamentation pour  
And thoughts of love instil into the heart.  
But all these pleasures are but maimed and fade  
If thou from us, my lord, shalt keep apart.

From the ode appealing to Colonna, who is going to Rome:

O noble spirit, which the limbs dost rule  
Wherein doth pass his days of pilgrimage,  
A valiant lord, courteous alike and sage,  
Since to the honored staff thy hand is laid  
That Rome and all her truant sons shall school  
And call them back into their ancient way,  
I speak to thee, since nowhere else a ray  
I see of virtue, which on earth is dead;  
Nor find I one ashamed of doing wrong,  
Nor know what she awaits, for what may long,  
Our Italy; she will not feel her woe,  
Lazy and old and slow.  
Sleeps she for aye? Will none to rouse her cate?  
Oh, that my hands were twisted in her hair!

I do not hope that from that sluggish sleep  
     Her head will rise, however man may call,  
     Her frame oppressed such heavy burdens keep;  
 But not unfated to thy arms has come,  
     Able to shake and lift her from her thrall,  
 The head of all our nation, even Rome.  
 Lay then upon those honored locks thy grasp  
 Firmly, and those dishevelled tresses clasp  
     Till the neglectful rise from out the mire.  
 Go! For her sorrows day and night I moan;  
 My feeble hope I rest on thee alone;  
     For if his race their sire  
 The war-god bid to honor turn his eyes  
 Within thy day, methinks, such light shall rise.

I give what is called a *sestina*, where six words, with which the first six lines end, have the order changed in the succeeding groups of six, solely to exhibit the rhyming effect. The original is tedious, and the translation is of course more so.

The loaded air and the oppressive cloud,  
 Raised by the might of the infuriate wind,  
 Threatens ere long to turn to falling rain.  
 Already now as crystal are the streams,  
 And in the place of herbage o'er the vales  
 Naught else is there to see but frost and ice.  
     And I within my heart more cold than ice  
 Of heavy thoughts am weighed beneath a cloud  
 Such as whilom arises from these vales  
 When close embraced by the loving wind  
 And fenced on every side by sluggish streams  
 When from the heaven there falls a gentler rain.  
     But in an hour will pass the heaviest rain,  
 And noontide heat dispel the snow and ice;  
 Whence sweep across our gaze the haughty streams,



Nor ever hid the heaven so black a cloud  
That when it met the fury of the wind  
It did not flee away from hills and vales.

But ah! for me there smile no flowery vales;  
Rather I weep in sunshine and in rain,  
Both in the frosty and the softer wind;  
The day that sees my lady feel no ice  
Within, nor bear without the wonted cloud,  
Then dry shall I behold the lakes and streams.

As long as to the sea descend the streams,  
And beasts delight to range the shady vales,  
Before those lovely eyes will stand that cloud  
Whence wells from mine their everlasting rain;  
And in the lovely breast the hardened ice  
Which draws from mine the ever sighing wind.

All night I pardon every cruel wind  
For love of one whose power between the streams  
Shut me in lovely green and charming ice.  
So that I pictured o'er a thousand vales  
The shadow where I was, nor heat nor rain  
Reck'd I, nor sound from out the gathered cloud.

But no escape have I from cloud by wind  
As on that day, nor ever streams by rain  
Nor ice, whene'er the sun shall ope the vales.

A denunciation of all the wickedness of the papal  
city:

May flame from heaven be on thy tresses shed,  
Thou wicked one; by making others poor  
Rich art thou grown and great, who like a boor  
On water and on acorns late wast fed.  
O nest of treachery! wherein are bred  
All seeds of wrong that fill the earth to-day,  
Where revelry maintains her fullest sway.  
Slave to thy wine, thy viands, and thy bed,  
Along thy halls old men and harlots pass  
Romping, and Belzebub amid their crew,

Wielding the fire, the bellows, and the glass.  
 Thy birth no bed of down nor shelter knew;  
 Bare to the wind, and shoeless on the grass,  
 Thy stench shall reek to God, and make thee rue.

An appeal to soften Laura's sternness (Macgregor):

A thousand times, sweet warrior, have I tried  
 Proffering my heart to thee, some peace to gain  
 From those bright eyes; but still, alas! in vain;  
 To such low level stoops not thy chaste pride.  
 If others sought the love thus thrown aside,  
 Vain were their hopes and labors to obtain  
 The heart thou spurnest; I alike disdain  
 To thee displeasing, 't is by me denied.  
 But if discarded thus, it find not thee  
 Its joyless exile willing to befriend,  
 Alone, untaught at others' will to wend,  
 Soon from life's weary burden will it flee.  
 How heavy, then, the guilt to both, but more  
 To thee, for thee it did the most adore.

A description of Laura's beauty (Anonymous, 1795):

Loose to the breeze her golden tresses flowed,  
 Wild in a thousand mazy ringlets blown;  
 And from her eyes unconquered glances shone,  
 Those glances now so sparingly bestowed.  
 And true or false, meseemed some signs she showed  
 As o'er her cheek soft pity's hue was thrown.  
 I whose whole breast with Love's soft food was sown,  
 What wonder if at once my bosom glowed?  
 Graceful she moved, with more than mortal mien,  
 In form an angel; and her accents won  
 Upon the ear with more than human sound,  
 A spirit heavenly pure, a living sun,  
 Was what I saw; and if no more 't were seen  
 To unbend the bow, will never heal the wound.

Among all Petrarch's poems, the ode beginning "Chiare, fresche e dolce acque" is universally esteemed one of the most beautiful; it is certainly one of the most untranslatable. I give a portion from the version of Leigh Hunt, who, if any one, knew Italian poetry:

Clear, fresh, and dulcet streams,  
Which the fair shape, that seems  
To me sole woman haunted at noontide;  
Fair bough, so gently fit  
(I sigh to think of it),  
Which lent a pillar to her lovely side;  
And turf, and flowers bright-eyed,  
O'er which her folded gown  
Flowed like an angel's down;  
And you, O holy air and hushed,  
Where first my heart at her sweet glances gushed,  
Give ear, give ear, with one consenting  
To my last words, my last and my lamenting.  
If 't is my fate below,  
And heaven will have it so,  
That Love must close these dying eyes in tears,  
May my poor dust be laid  
In middle of your shade,  
While my soul naked mounts to its own spheres;  
The thought would calm my fears  
When taking, out of breath,  
The doubtful step of death;  
For never could my spirit find  
A stiller port, after the stormy wind.  
Nor in more calm, abstracted bourne  
Slip from my travailed flesh, and from my bones  
outworn.  
Perhaps some future hour,  
To her accustomed bower  
Might come the untamed and yet the gentle she;  
And where she saw me first

Might turn with eyes athirst  
 And kinder joy to look again for me;  
 Then seeing 'midst the stones  
 The earth that held my bones,  
 A sigh for very love at last  
 Might ask of Heaven to pardon me the past;  
 And Heaven itself could not say nay  
 As with her gentle veil she wiped the tears away.

From the sonnets written after Laura's death  
 (Macgregor) :

Had I e'er thought that to the world so dear  
 The echoes of my sighs would be in rhyme,  
 I would have made them in my sorrow's prime  
 Rarer in style, in number more appear.  
 Since she is dead, my muse who prompted here  
 First in my thought and feelings all the time,  
 All power is lost of tender or sublime  
 My rough dark verse to render soft and clear.  
 And surely my sole study and desire  
 Was but—I knew not how—in those long years  
 To unburden my sad heart, not fame acquire;  
 I wept, but sought no honor in my tears.  
 Now would I gladly please; but that high fair  
 Silent and weary calls me to her there.

On the death of his friend Senuccio (Morehead) :

O friend! though left a wretched pilgrim here,  
 By thee though left in solitude to roam,  
 Yet can I mourn that thou hast found thy home  
 On angel pinions borne, in bright career?  
 Now thou behold'st the ever-turning sphere,  
 And stars that journey round the vaulted dome:  
 Now thou behold'st how short of truth we come,  
 How blind our judgment, and thine own how clear!  
 That thou art happy soothes my soul oppressed.  
 O friend, salute for me the laurelled band,

Guido and Cino, Dante and the rest;  
 And tell my Laura, friend, that here I stand, one  
 Wasting in tears, scarce of myself possessed,  
 While her blest beauties all my thoughts command.

His sense of Laura's presenee (Maegregor) :

Methinks from hour to hour her voice I hear:  
 My lady calls me! I would fain obey.  
 Within, without, I feel myself decay,  
 And am so altered—not with many a year—  
 That to myself a stranger I appear;  
 All my old usual life is put away.  
 Could I but know how long I have to stay—  
 Grant, Heaven, the long-wished summons may be near!  
 Oh, blest the day when from this earthly jail  
 I shall be freed, when burst and scattered lies  
 This mortal weed, so heavy yet so frail,  
 When from this black night my saved spirit flies,  
 Soaring aloft into the bright serene  
 Where with my Lord my lady shall be seen.

I give a few lines from Lady Barbarina Daere's  
 version of the Triumph of Death; but the task of pre-  
 serving the rhymes is too arduous.

O hope, how false! How blind all human thought!  
 Whether in earth sank deep the dews of woe  
 For the bright spirit that has passed away.  
 Think, ye who listen! They who witnessed know  
 'T was the first hour of April, the sixth day,  
 That bound me, and, alas! now sets me free.  
 How Fortune doth her fickleness display!  
 None ever grieved for loss of liberty  
 Or doom of death as I for freedom grieve  
 And life prolonged, who only ask to die.

## CHAPTER II

THE ROMANCISTS—PULCI, BOIARDO, BERNI

ONE must not suppose that Petrarch was the only poet of his time ; but his genius was so far beyond all others that it has thrown them into the shade, whence they are not likely to emerge. But a place, though not perhaps a brilliant one, must be accorded among Italian poets to the third great writer of the period, the easy and witty master of prose narrative,—Giovanni Boccaccio. His life, which extended from 1313 to 1375, would more properly come into a general discussion of Italian writers in prose as well as poetry, and I only mention him here as connected with that form of verse which all Italy adopted from him as the best medium for narrative and satirical poetry, easier to write and read than the complicated *terza rima* of Dante. It is arranged in stanzas of eight lines, the first six rhyming alternately and the last two forming an independent couplet. It is most familiar to English readers in Byron's "Don Juan," but Boccaccio, if not its absolute inventor, was the one who

gave it its vogue. He composed in it two poems, one the "Teseide," whence Chaucer took the material of his "Knight's Tale," and Shakespeare some hints for the "Midsummer Night's Dream"; and another poem, called "Filostrato," which sets forth the tale of Troilus and Cressida. On this again Chaucer founded a poem of portentous length, and Shakespeare a drama exhibiting some of his rarest powers. I take from this a few stanzas, chiefly to illustrate a quality of the Italian mind to which it is sure to revert if left to itself, —I mean simplicity, sometimes approaching childishness of thought. Even Dante and Petrarch, with all the depth and intricacy both of ideas and expression, will sometimes startle us by coming back to an absolutely simple stream of thought and verse; and in Boccaccio's narrative we find an unchecked flow which recalls such ancients as Theocritus and Catullus, and which all careful students of Italy know is at the bottom of her character under all the overlying art. This is not merely in the expression; it is wholly by the emotions and passions of the heart that the poet seeks to awaken an interest. The works of nature and the works of man are scarcely mentioned, and then only as backgrounds to the men and women whose feelings are related.

More she would say; but on her lover's breast  
Fell with her face, as death itself were near,

Such mighty agony her heart oppressed,  
Her spirit struggled for a passage clear;  
The prince beheld upon her looks impressed  
The change, and that his words she did not hear;  
And from the pallor o'er her features spread  
He must indeed believe that she was dead.

Thus suffering, wretched, and in anguish bound,  
From double pain he wished himself to slay.  
Full oft he kissed the face that tears had drowned,  
Seeking to kindle the departed ray;  
But when in all his grief no sign he found  
Of life in her, nor power from death to stay  
His ill-starred lady, whom her grief o'ercame,  
He felt assured extinguished was the flame.

Pallid and cold and without sense she lay,  
For all that Troilus perceived or knew;  
And so that ended was her lovely day  
Of life, to him appeared assurance true;  
And thus when grief had had its fullest way,  
Before he sought the realm to death to view,  
Her face he covered, and her limbs composed,—  
Service we pay to those whose life is closed.

It was long years after the death of Petrarch and Boccaccio that any truly valuable addition was made to Italian poetry. Dante had effectually frightened off all who might care to write with masculine vigor, while Petrarch's poetry had just the opposite effect, of encouraging a score of imitators, all producing something fairly in the amatory style, that is, fairly like Petrarch, and never showing on anything the stamp of genius. These two poets, their predecessors and followers, wrote chiefly for a select few, and though



in Italy in the year 1400 the aristocracy of literature was comparatively more numerous than in other countries, its favorite poetry could hardly be called popular.

But there was floating in the minds of Italians a mass of legend, which had taken literary form, that gentle and simple alike could enjoy, and, one would say, could alike understand, if it were not that neither wanted to understand it. It could be enjoyed solely as a matter of fancy and feeling, without requiring the solution of the deep problems of Dante or the intricate ones of Petrarch. This mass was composed of the romances of chivalry.

The age of Petrarch had seen knighthood in its fullest splendors, when the champion cavalier, whose brilliant prowess could turn a battle or even a campaign at his will, was not yet extinct in actual practical warfare, and when, on the other hand, chivalry was chiefly known by gorgeous pageantry, tournaments, and passages of arms, which Robert of Normandy or even Richard Cœur de Lion would have thought a waste of time and money. The battle of Crécy was fought when Petrarch and Boccaccio were at the prime of life, the Order of the Garter had just been founded, and the Black Prince begun the career which ranked him the flower of knighthood. Yet when we read that cannon appeared at the same battle, we know that the

ideal knighthood, the reign of champions, each a match for a hundred common soldiers, must soon pass away. In the fifteenth century, then, chivalry was turning to pageantry, and warfare approaching its modern form, where the common soldier does the fighting and the illustrious leader mainly directs.

As actual knighthood became every year less of a memory and more of a tradition, there grew up strange stories of the knights of old. With great variety in the details, these all may be considered as bits of one interminable whole. They all represent a time when Europe was divided into a number of Christian monarchies, and Asia and Africa, the latter including Spain, into as many pagan or Mohammedan kingdoms, each class perpetually at war with the other—war in which hundreds of thousands come into the field, yet the battle is decided or prolonged by the prowess of a few knights, all fit foemen or companions in arms for one another, and each equal to slaying or routing the military rabble by scores and myriads.

In fact, one does not exactly see why these vast armies come into the field at all. The Duke of Wellington remarked that he considered the presence of Napoleon as equal to thirty thousand men; so if the kings on both sides know each that his rival would have with him a score of invincible paladins, one would think they might save the lives of their subjects to till the

ground at home, and bid these superhuman cavaliers fight it out among themselves. As far as Europe goes, every country is understood to furnish one or more first-rate knights; in the romances of Britain and Gaul these were grouped around Arthur, that semi-mythical prince who made head against the Saxons, when attacking the west of Britain from the Forth to the Channel. But the romances from which the Italian poets drew their themes made their Christian knights fight under the imperial sway of Charles the Great or Charlemagne. He claims the allegiance, or at least the alliance, of all the princes in the north, centre, and west of Europe; Spain being held by the Saracens, with whom he is never at peace, and the south of Italy, rarely mentioned, being in a like state.

All this might pass for very decent history; but there is heaped upon Charlemagne and his Paladins everything of a military nature which took place in Europe from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. Any exploit and any institution of chivalry that the romancers had ever heard of were associated with the stern German who broke the power of the heathen Saxon from his palace at Aachen, but whom they represent as ruling from Paris, a city which history records that he only once visited in all his long reign. His knights, from every Christian land, are led by a number of special heroes, called Paladins, and always spoken of with

the same respect as Hercules or Hector, Alexander or Cæsar, or the great Charles himself. Foremost among them is Roland, in Italian Orlando, who is recognized by all as a peerless cavalier. When he fights, every one, Christian or Pagan, must yield, if they fight fair; if ever he is overcome, it is by treachery. This is supplied by one Gan or Ganellon, of the house of Maganza, who is always spoken of as the ideal traitor, who could not be faithful or true if he wanted to. According to one story, which appears in many romances, the rear-guard of Charlemagne's army, under its command of Roland, was, by Ganellon's treachery, cut off in a defile of the Pyrenees, and massacred by the Saracens, Roland being unable to get any assistance from the emperor. Other paladins are Ogier, or Holger, the national hero of Denmark; the Marquis Oliver; Astolfo of Britain; and, above all, Rinaldo, the cousin of Roland, and nearly equal to him in prowess. These Christian knights find no lack of worthy foemen among the Saracens, many of whom are represented as positively gigantic in stature, such as Ferrau, the direct ancestor of Admiral Farragut. Another who, as hero of chivalry, is equal to Roland himself, is Roger or Ruggiero, who, after fighting zealously for an African king, is discovered to be of Christian lineage, and reclaimed to that side. A third is one whose character has given a word to all modern languages: Rodomonte, the King

of Sarza, who adores neither Christ nor Mohammed, fears neither God nor devil, and is so absolutely boundless in his boasting that we recall him whenever we talk of rodomontade.

The conflicts of these knights with each other are often personal, and have little reference to their causes, whether of race or creed. Orlando fights with his cousin Rinaldo, a great deal of very bad language being used on both sides, and Rodomonte fights with Ruggiero when their joint help is seriously needed by their commander. It should particularly be noticed that these combats are scarcely ever fair, according to our notions, because one of the parties is likely to be assisted by magic. He may be as invulnerable as Achilles, or he may have a helmet as impenetrable and a sword as all-penetrating as in any story of Grimm's. It really seems mean to allow an antagonist to strike at you for hours continuously and let him think he has ruined you, because the weight of his blows has made you to bend your head to the saddle-bow, or even fall to the ground, when you know all the time that enchantment saves your armor from ever getting a crack or your skin a gash. Christian knights are not safe from this magic, even in their own continent, where the mighty Merlin, the sorcerer of Arthur's court, has left several monuments of his incantations; but as soon as they get beyond Europe,

ranging for adventure in Africa and Asia, there is absolutely no telling what witchcraft may do to them.

Every one knows that a very important part in romance is played by ladies. Every knight is supposed to have one lady to whom he is devoted, and whom he looks forward to marrying when his warfare gives him a respite; but he is also bound to rescue and succor all distressed females as soon as he knows of their needs, however much such aid may interfere with the most important expeditions. I cannot resist the impression, derived from reading some of the chief romances, that the ladies of chivalry exhibit much more variety than the men. We have them of all degrees of beauty, of fidelity and honor, of duplicity and craft, and especially of all degrees of valor, from the Amazon who never takes off her armor, to the unresisting maiden who lets herself be tied by the hair to a tree for a considerable time.

But the marvellous thing about all these characters, men, women, and monsters,—for the last are not lacking,—is their almost complete insensibility to physical conditions. They are able to go without eating or drinking for an indefinite period of time. They are very sure, in the course of their adventures, to arrive sooner or later at some brilliant palace, where they are treated with boundless hospitality, and partake of the costliest meats and wines; but it may have been many

days of hard riding, interrupted by fighting, since their last meal, which have brought them to this provision. An inn for travellers is not an absolutely unknown building, nor is the cell of a hermit; but one is about as likely to be met with as the other.

And just so about clothes. On certain great occasions the knights and ladies came out in magnificent costumes; but as a rule they ride days and weeks on horseback, to all the countries of the earth, carrying simply nothing in the nature of a change with them, subject, as they are, to the most thrilling accidents by field and flood. They sleep pretty regularly, being quite able to get off their horses, turn them out to pasture, and take a nap anywhere; and it may be noticed that, while their garments wax not old, neither do their shoes wear out. The condition of their armor is more miraculous still. Knights fight for a whole day, dealing and receiving most fearful blows with lance, sword, and mace, which, we are told in so many words over and over again, neither plate nor mail can stand; but after shield and hauberk and helmet have been repeatedly shattered, and no squire brings any new armor,—and if he did there is no time to put it on,—the champions are still fighting, the blows fall as before, the armor is shattered as before, and renews itself like Mayflower furniture.

It should be noticed that the horses and the swords

of the Paladins are quite as important as themselves or their ladies. The horses *Brigliadoro* and *Baiardo* are famed from *Marseilles* to *Cathay*, and are prized by their owners and their riders' enemies beyond a king's ransom. But every great knight's sword has its name and its individual value, and we hear about *Durindana* and *Balisarda* and *Frusberta* till they bore as much as *Cooper's Killbuck*.

But perhaps the most remarkable exemption from all physical laws is in the geography and topography of the romances. In a time when wheeled carriages are unheard of, and horses afford the only method of land-carriage, the knights and ladies think nothing of setting out on an expedition from *Paris* to *Tartary*, where they expect to meet in a reasonable time, and always to hit the roads. This last is not altogether so absurd as it looks, for there were, and had been for centuries on centuries, regular lines of transportation from east to west of *Asia* by caravans, whose tracks were not difficult to keep if once hit. But it is rather startling to have a knight who has been fighting to the death in some undefined spot of eastern *Asia* learn from a messenger that the emperor is under extreme pressure in *France* and needs instant aid, post off through *Persia*, *Armenia*, *Hungary*, and *Germany*, and turn up smiling in the *Forest of Ardennes* without a word as to the stages or delays of his passage. Still



more singular is it when a bevy of knights and ladies on various expeditions are intercepted and imprisoned in an enchanted lake for months, till released by a champion. They break up into parties, which start, each for its own former destination, without the slightest question that the road thither will reveal itself before long and the passage there be plain. In short, time, space, and physical weakness are no barriers to the attainment of any desired goal.

The explanation of all this mass of absurdities and contradictions is that people in every age love to hear the story of adventure; that life in the Middle Ages was either very monotonous, consisting in daily drudgery from which it was impossible to get away, or of terribly exciting events when pestilence or public war, or, worst of all, private feud, came down upon the dull country life, remote from the great centres of activity, and swept it like a tornado. Men wanted to hear of something that was done with activity, energy, variety, different from their own dulness, and with generosity, courage, and self-denial, different from the tyranny and misery of their own excitement. A realistic poem, a poem describing probable and possible life, would not have amused them, for half of their actual life was dreary and the other half was painful.

The romances are full of action; there is not much philosophizing; now and then a lover or a hero will

stop to indulge in grief or remorse, but it is chiefly action and conversation, both going on in a full stream which nothing can stop,—and one might say nothing ever does stop it. As the romances used to be recited by the early minstrels, they were doubtless to be had in lengths,—to be listened to for a short hour in the evening, when, after the long day's hunting and the heavy supper, there was still a little time before bed,—or for a whole day when a heavy storm or perhaps a siege kept people shut up in the castle. But even when the romance had passed out of the uncouth verse, and scarcely less uncouth prose, of the early writers into the hands of poets of some skill, taste, and even genius, it runs on to an inconceivable length, or a length that can only be conceived by an age which has brought itself to believe that “*The Ring and the Book*” is not absurdly long. Ariosto's “*Orlando Furioso*” is one of the shorter romances—it has forty-six cantos; Pulci, Boiardo, and Berni have each over fifty, and the “*Amadigi*” of Bernardo Tasso has a hundred.

This account of the romances of chivalry relates rather to the subject-matter of these poets. It was in the stirring fifteenth century, when literature had become all the rage, when political strife was at its highest in the cities of Italy, and all the arts were waking into unheard-of life, that one man of genius after another discovered the wealth of material hid in these

rude and wild tales that were floating round in all nations, and used them for narrative poems of immense force and beauty. It would be tedious even to name all the poets who made one or another of the Paladins his hero in an epic of romance; the four who have just been mentioned are most notable.

It is curious that the first writer who determined to give literary style to an epic of romance attacked the enterprise from what one might call the modern side—the burlesque. Luigi Pulci was a Florentine of high birth whose life extended from 1432 to 1487. He was one of the favorite companions of Lorenzo de' Medici in the brilliant society which he gathered round him at the Villa Careggi. Very little is known of his life; and his character is shown to us chiefly by his handling of the legends of chivalry in his poem of the "*Morgante Maggiore*." This poem, while following out generally the favorite legend of the attack on Charlemagne by the Saracens and the loss of Orlando by treachery, is conceived in a different spirit alike from the old romancists who furnish the material, and from most of Pulci's contemporaries and successors who versified it. Besides the usual array of Christian Paladins, heathen knights, sorcerers, and fair ladies, whom Pulci received clothed in the purple robes of chivalry and chronicled most seriously, he introduces the giant Morgante and the rogue Margutte. The first

is a Saracen giant whom Orlando, after killing his two brothers, converts and baptizes; for the Paladins were constantly converting their foemen by arguments that never fail, and baptizing them into soldiers of the Cross devoted to their teachers. Morgante becomes Orlando's devoted servant, and proves most useful, as he wields the strength of a dozen men and clears his master's path of all obstacles. The three brothers have been the terror of a certain abbey till Orlando arrives, kills two giants, and converts Morgante, who becomes his liegeman and provisions the amazed monks as follows:

There being a want of water in the place,  
Orlando, like a worthy brother, said,  
"Morgante, I could wish you in this case  
To go for water." "You shall be obeyed  
In all commands," was the reply, "straightways."  
Upon his shoulder a great tub he laid,  
And went out on his way unto a fountain  
Where he was wont to drink below the mountain.

Arrived there, a prodigious noise he hears,  
Which suddenly along the forest spread;  
Whereat from out his quiver he prepares  
An arrow for his bow, and lifts his head;  
And lo! a monstrous herd of swine appears,  
And onward rushes with tempestuous tread,  
And to the fountain's brink precisely pours;  
So that the giant's join'd by all the boars.

Morgante at a venture shot an arrow  
Which pierced a pig precisely in the ear,

And passed unto the other side quite thorough;  
So that the boar, defunct, lay tripp'd up near.  
Another, to revenge his fellow-farrow,  
Against the giant rush'd in fierce career,  
And reach'd the passage with so swift a foot,  
Morgante was not now in time to shoot.

Perceiving that the pig was on him close,  
He gave him such a punch upon the head  
As floor'd him so that he no more arose,  
Smashing the very bone; and he fell dead  
Next to the other. Having seen such blows,  
The other pigs along the valley fled;  
Morgante on his neck the bucket took,  
Full from the spring, which neither swerved nor shook.

The tun was on one shoulder, and there were  
The hogs on t'other, and he brush'd apace  
On to the abbey, though by no means near,  
Nor spilt one drop of water in his race.  
Orlando, seeing him so soon appear  
With the dead boars, and with that brimful vase,  
Marvell'd to see his strength so very great;  
So did the abbot, and set wide the gate.

This is Lord Byron's translation, which is very spirited and fairly exact, though not so precisely literal as he asserted. He only published one canto, which did not attract sufficient attention to induce him to go on with the other fifty-two. But he developed the same stanza to perfection in "Beppo" and "Don Juan."

Pulci's other original character is Margutte, who is a professed seamp and thief. He declares himself on his first appearance to be a knave not merely by practice but by choice. He is positively unhappy when he

is not cheating or robbing somebody. His special delight is to induce an innkeeper to lodge and board him, and, after living as long as he thinks fit on the fat of the land, to disappear, carrying off about himself every article belonging to mine host which he has not already put into himself. He discusses his own adventures in the most shameless manner, and delights to enlarge at enormous length on his love of good cooking, pouring out stanza after stanza in enumeration of all sorts of delicacies, especially fish, which, it is well known, all Italians have always a mighty love for. And it is very noticeable what a large share good eating, or what was deemed good eating, plays in all the pictures of life at this time in Italy. It is plain that the common people at least had no conception of comfort but plenty to eat and drink and a fire in winter. Nay; the life of the wealthy, though often gorgeous, would seem to us comfortless. Furniture, clothing, and domestic appointments must have been but squalid with all their magnificence, and crude with all their elaboration.

The device of stringing out, name after name, a whole catalogue of objects which happen to suggest themselves, is a favorite device of Pulci's, and makes much of his poem insufferably tedious. Trees, stars, fishes, jewels, beasts, birds,—he has them all listed and sets forth his lists in eight-line stanzas. There are

other and greater poets who have fallen into the same error. Ovid has yielded to it; so has Spenser; but it was reserved for an American to offer his countrymen long strings of names, arranged, or rather muddled, in lines neither prose nor verse, and deeply tainted with obscenity, as the veritable poetry, for which they are to discard Bryant and Whittier, of whose name this person's sounds like an awkward imitation. And a worthy but greatly mistaken society undertakes to proscribe Boccaccio, and leaves any book-store free to sell the irretrievable beastliness of "Leaves of Grass."

Pulci has other tricks of style, such as beginning every line of a stanza with the same word, like "This" or "Which"; but his difficulty, and hence his tedium, is greatly enhanced even to good Italian scholars by his writing, not the Tuscan language, but the Florentine dialect, filling his pages with what must sound immensely witty to those who chance to have mastered this *patois*,—for such it is, even in lovely Florence,—but unintelligible to such as know only classic Italian. He thus proposes to add to the comic effect of the whole poem, which turns all subjects, including those generally held sacred, not exactly into ridicule, but into broad fun. Indeed, he handles monks and priests in such a way that he has often been accused of enmity to all religion. This, I think, is not sensible

criticism. The Italians of Pulci's day had but little respect for the Papacy or Church establishments generally, which indeed were in a state to make the best friends of religion sad, and sure to lead to some great catastrophe. Moreover, the literary and scientific discovery that was pouring in over all the world was not likely to sustain the spirit of undoubting reverence. In the generation after Pulci, pure heathenism reigned in the very Vatican; but in his lifetime the attitude of the people to sacred names and ideas was rather that of free, not to say impudent, familiarity, such as we find lately in the delicious popular tales of Frederic Baron Corvo—the state of feeling expressed in the “Biglow Papers” in such lines as:

“God has said so, plump and fairly—  
Et 's as long as it is broad;  
An' you 've gut to git up airly  
Ef you want to take in God.”

I have had an Englishman insist that this was irreverent; he simply did not know the Yankee character. Pulci begins every canto with an invocation to the Heavenly Father, the Virgin, or some of the saints; and his whole poem impresses me as the work of a man who never questions the great principles of religion as his age received them, but despises superstition and asceticism. In spite of all its drawbacks, the “Morgante” is very amusing and bright reading.



Contemporary with Pulci, and almost as well entitled to be called the father of romance poetry, was a very different man,—Count Matteo Boiardo, of the northern Reggio. Of him scarcely more is known than of Pulci, except that his patrician birth associated him with the high-born of all nations, beginning with the Emperor Frederic III, whose imperial lineage was his only remarkable quality, and gave him the position of governor of his native town. He was buried in the Cathedral of Ferrara, and his life extended from 1430 to 1494. His additions to Italian literature were various, and replete with the learning of the time. But the chief is a voluminous romance entitled “Orlando Innamorato.” It tells how, when Charles had all his peers round him, there suddenly appeared at his court Angelica, the daughter of Galaphrone, from the country of Cataia, the most beautiful of her sex, accompanied by a champion, who was prepared to fight with any of the paladins in order to win the sword Durindana and the horse Brigliadoro, now in possession of Orlando. Forthwith Angelica’s beauty excites such a flame in the heart of many knights, but chiefly of Orlando, that a countless series of adventures arise, extending from China to Morocco, and in lands unknown to geography, where knights and ladies and fairies and demons are entangled in complications fully equal to any in the “Arabian

Nights." The story is more carefully constructed than Pulci's; the fancy is very lively, the different threads are fairly well kept in hand, and the author never loses sight of his multifarious characters in all their wanderings. The language is purer and more classical than Pulci's, and most certainly the good count never could be accused of irreverence or flippancy. He is most profoundly solemn, and appears to have no more doubt of the marvels he describes than Hamlet has of the reality of his father's ghost; though he does warn us, in lines taken bodily from Dante, to mind the hidden meaning conveyed under this fairy guise. But this very faith makes him heavy; he has but little wit or play, except when he approaches the character of Astolfo, the British knight, who is always treated as somewhat of a buffoon; his various people are hardly individual enough to make the reader keep the complex throng in view, and his verse seems rough and uncouth from a countryman of Petrarch's. The result was that, though Boiardo's contemporaries recognized his real force, the form was felt to be so unworthy of the matter that two poets of the succeeding generation determined to recast the "*Orlando Innamorato*." The work of one of these proved of little account, but the other, Francesco Berni, threw such stores of varied genius into the labor of reconstruction that his poem wholly superseded the original, leaving Boiardo almost

a bare name, and making his poem hard to procure till a new edition, the first for centuries, was given to the public by the well-known librarian of the British Museum, Antonio Panizzi. From this I take a short and characteristic combat, almost at random :

Now on the bridge the champion stands revealed  
With plate and mail full-armed and covered well;  
And Balisardo grasps his mighty shield,  
Like one who tried in battle doth excel;  
Both one and other 'gan the mace to wield,  
So that a lively game one might foretell;  
Each dealing blows with such a mighty clang  
The very river to its bottom rang.

Dudon a stroke delivered at the head,  
And broke the circle of his polished helm;  
The mighty blow with such a sweep had sped  
That Balisardo prone it did o'erwhelm.  
Both hands did Dudon ply, nor ever stayed,  
Bold youth, upon the flower of pagan realm,  
He struck the shield that was of silver bright,  
And laid it open, did this gallant knight.

But like as it had waked him from his sleep,  
That second blow, the baughty Saracen  
Up from the earth unterrified did leap  
And the fierce attack returned again.  
Aiming at Dudon's flank he levelled deep  
Blows with his club, which was not light or thin,  
More than a hundred pounds that club would weigh,  
And on the earth the youth extended lay.

But he got up again, and went on fighting through some stanzas more as fresh as ever.

Francesco Berni was born towards the end of the

fifteenth century, of a noble but poor family in Florence, and early went to Rome to seek his fortune under the protection of a kinsman high in the Church, from whom he says he got neither good nor ill. He received a position at the court of Leo X, whence he derived little profit, and an attempt to better his fortunes by taking holy orders failed of success even in that easy time. He belonged to a society of the young wits of the true Bohemian type, who consoled themselves in their narrow means by leading such a life as would not encourage any friend to try and better their fortunes. Berni did not gather much of this world's goods, and what he did was all swept away in the terrific sack of Rome by Bourbon in 1527. He then returned to Florence, where he received a sort of patronage from the Medici, a race degenerating rapidly from the time of the great Lorenzo. Their household was stained by intrigues of the blackest character, in which it should appear that they tried in vain to entangle the poet, and when Alexander de' Medici had died by poison, Berni followed in a few months, a victim, it has been supposed, of family jealousy.

Berni ranks high in the class of satirists of which the next generation produced two such illustrious examples as Rabelais and Montaigne. He had an eye to observe and a tongue to note the humors and follies of his day not surpassed by either; and he added to

his satirical a poetic gift to which neither of them ever laid claim, and which ranks him with Horace, Juvenal, and Dryden. To the first of these he bears much resemblance; for, although he can be as bitter as any one, his prevailing tone is genial, and instinet with a good nature, of which Juvenal had little, and which would have been at variance with Dryden's object. He is recognized in Italy as the perfecter of the *ottava rima* for satiric purposes, and from him that style which Byron used so wonderfully in "Beppo" and "Don Juan" is called Bernesque. His satires are so full of allusion to his own time that, like Aristophanes and Juvenal, they can hardly be read without encyclopædic notes. But Berni's "Orlando Innamorato" is a wonderful poem. It seems amazing that a man of original genius should have the patience to go through another man's poem of over sixty cantos, supplying to all exactly what was needed in the way of addition, correction, omission, and, in fact, inspiration. Dr. Johnson's definition of poetic genius, however stilted, exactly defines Berni's: "Genius, that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgment is cold, and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates." The worthy Count Matteo would probably have been scandalized by the way the canon has adapted his "Orlando" to the popular taste, but

after all Boiardo is chiefly known as the man who wrote the "Orlando Innamorato" for Berni to revise.

I read a couple of extracts from the version of W. S. Rose, the friend of Sir Walter Scott. One is a description of the two fountains, one which imparted, and the other which killed, love by a draught; the second is where Berni has introduced himself as a character :

Mount Alban's lord, whose strength and spirits sink,  
For yet the sun was high and passing hot,  
Stood gazing on the pearly fountain's brink,  
Rapt with the sight of that delicious spot.  
At length he can no more; but stoops to drink,  
And thirst and love are in the draught forgot:  
For such the virtue those cold streams impart,  
Changed in an instant is the warrior's heart.

Him, with that forest's wonders unacquainted,  
Some paces to a second water bring,  
Of crystal wave with rain or soil untainted.  
With all the flowers that wreath the brows of spring  
Kind nature had the verdant margin painted:  
And there a pine and beech and olive fling  
Their boughs above the stream, and form a bower,  
A grateful shelter from the noontide hour.

This was the stream of love, upon whose shore  
He chanced, where Merlin no enchantment shed;  
But nature here, unchanged by magic lore,  
The fountain with such sovereign virtue fed,  
That all who tasted loved: whence many, sore  
Lamenting their mistake, were ill-bested.  
Rinaldo wandered to this water's brink,  
But, sated, had no further wish to drink.

Yet the delicious trees and banks produce  
Desire to try the grateful shade; and needing  
Repose, he 'lights, and turns his courser loose,  
Who roamed the forest, at his pleasure feeding;  
And there Rinaldo cast him down, at truce  
With care; and slumber to repose succeeding,  
Thus slept supine: when spiteful fortune brought  
Her to the spot whom least the warrior sought.

She thirsts, and lightly leaping from her steed,  
Ties the gay palfrey to the lofty pine;  
Then plucking from the stream a little reed,  
Sips, as a man might savour muscat wine;  
And feels while yet she drinks (such marvel breed  
The waters fraught with properties divine)  
She is no longer what she was before;  
And next beholds the sleeper on the shore.

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His mood was choleric, and his tongue was vicious,  
But he was praised for singleness of heart;  
Not taxed as avaricious or ambitious,  
Affectionate, and frank, and void of art;  
A lover of his friends, and unsuspicious;  
But where he hated, knew no middle part;  
And men his malice by his love might rate:  
But then he was more prone to love than hate.

To paint his person,—this was thin and dry;  
Well sorting it, his legs were spare and lean;  
Broad was his visage, and his nose was high,  
While narrow was the space that was between  
His eyebrows sharp; and blue his hollow eye,  
Which for his bushy beard had not been seen,  
But that the master kept this thicket clear'd,  
At mortal war with moustache and with beard.

No one did ever servitude detest  
Like him; though servitude was still his dole:  
Since fortune or the devil did their best

To keep him evermore beneath controul.  
While, whatsoever was his patron's hest,  
To execute it went against his soul;  
His service would he freely yield, unasked,  
But lost all heart and hope, if he were tasked.

Nor musick, hunting-match, nor mirthful measure,  
Nor play, nor other pastime moved him aught:  
And if 't was true that horses gave him pleasure,  
The simple sight of them was all he sought,  
Too poor to purchase; and his only treasure  
His naked bed: his pastime to do nought  
But tumble there, and stretch his weary length,  
And so recruit his spirits and his strength.

Worn with the trade he long was used to slave in,  
So heartless and so broken down was he;  
He deemed he could not find a readier haven,  
Or safer port from that tempestuous sea;  
Nor better cordial to recruit his craven  
And jaded spirit, when he once was free,  
Than to betake himself to bed, and do  
Nothing, and mind and matter so renew.

On this, as on art, he would dilate  
In good set terms, and styled his bed a vest,  
Which, as the wearer pleased, was small or great,  
And of whatever fashion liked him best;  
A simple mantle, or a robe of state;  
With that a gown of comfort and of rest;  
Since whosoever slept his daily clothes  
For this, put off with these all worldly woes.

Berni no doubt deserves abundant praise for his work; and one would be tempted to say he did for the romantic epic all that the wit of a poet and a satirist combined could do, if it had not, even in his own time, fallen into the hands of a greater genius still. A



lecturer on Italian poetry must deal with Pulci, Boiardo, and Berni, and bless his stars that he may be excused from reading, or even naming, a score of other romances; but the general reader of Italian poetry may rest satisfied if he gives some attentive hours—and if he gives hours he will give days—to the greatest of all, the divine Ariosto, who will appear in my next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### ARIOSTO

No student of Italian poetry can fail to recognize how truly national a literature it is—national in its days of growth and roughness, national in the richness and force of its prime, national in its languid and luscious decay. The ancient Italy—the Italy of Scipio and Cæsar, of Lucretius and Cicero—had drawn recruits from many foreign nations, till her own writers inveighed vehemently against the corruptions which had flowed in from Greece and Syria and Egypt, and declared the beautiful mother had become only a step-mother to her inhabitants. And almost before she had time to assimilate all this heterogeneous matter, floods of invaders, first Goths and Lombards from the North, then Saracens from the South, poured over the plains of the Po and the cities of Lucania, and threatened to bury under new drift from the Danube or the Desert what the slime of the Nile and the Orontes had left unharmed. Yet the marvellous country, great

parent of crops and of men, received all the invaders to her generous bosom, subdued them by her charms, fed them on her ancient story, and taught them to feel that the glory of conquest which their hands had won was nothing to the glory of Italian citizenship, the gift of her sacred soil alone. Every tradition, every rite, every law which came down from the dim days of Romulus and Numa, of Tarquin and Porsena, of Camillus and Fabius, or the surer legacies of the Scipios and Gracchi, was just as living in the hearts of those who marched with Tancred to the Sepulchre, or ruled with Can Grande at Verona, as when Virgil and Horace told it to the new Romans from Gaul and Spain. Guido and Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, Pulci and Berni, are pure Italians, as distinct from Germans or Spaniards, from French or English, as these are from Bohemians or Russians,—and so were their successors for many centuries.

But of all the great authors at this period of Italian brilliancy, it seems to me the most widely national, if not more truly so than his brothers, is Ludovico Ariosto. It seems to me every other great Italian poet, from Dante to Carducci, represents some one phase of that strangely composite and diversified character, the offspring of so many nations. I can easily imagine Italians who would find Dante cruel and mystical, Petrarch academically cold, and Pulci wear-

some. Others might think Tasso superstitious, Alfieri savage, and Leopardi pessimistic. But Ariosto has something for every son of the beautiful country which the sea encircles and the Alps, which may speak alike to his heart and his head, to his common sense and his devotion, to his passion and his humor. The dreamy enthusiasm of the Celt, the artistic devotion of the Etruscan, the sturdy sense of the Roman, the versatile speculation of the Greek, the fatalism of the Saracen, the chivalry of the Goth, the enterprise of the Norman, have all contributed something to make up the poet of the Raging Roland.

Ludovico Ariosto was born in 1474, of noble ancestors, in the city of Modena. Like many renowned poets, notably Walter Scott, he was destined by his father for the law, but his poetic genius forced itself forward at an early age. He attended the University of Ferrara, and distinguished himself in his studies, but after five years given to the law the vanity of the effort was plain, and he devoted himself to poetry. Some lyrics of his attracted the notice of Cardinal Hippolito d'Este, and by him and his brother, the Duke Alfonso, after him, Ariosto was employed in various posts, mostly more honorable than lucrative. At their court he worked for years to perfect his epic of the "*Orlando Furioso*," which he published in 1516, the year before Luther's revolt, and which was

received by his reverend and princely patron with the words: "Where the devil, Master Louis, did you pick up such a mass of trash?" He still, however, showed the poet favor, if it may be called so, by requesting his company on a trip to Hungary, where public affairs called him. The poet entirely refused to leave his own country for a strange land and an uncongenial climate, and the refusal was by no means purely selfish. The eldest of a very large family, he had his brothers and sisters to provide for, and he had little reason to believe that an exile beyond the Danube would help him to this end. But losing the favor of one prince of Este, he passed into the service of the Duke Alfonso, and was by him attached to his household, and employed, as before, in various services. One commission in particular seems strangely alien to poetic genius: he was sent to put down a band of brigands which infested the milder parts of the duchy of Ferrara, and this singular service he appears to have executed successfully; but it has been a tradition in Italy for centuries that he was himself captured by the bandits he was sent to quell, and released unransomed for the sake of his poetry.

He turned his talents in many directions to produce poems serious and satirical, which might help him in the somewhat arduous cares of life; but he never wearied in the work of constantly correcting and im-

proving his great poem, of which the second edition appeared sixteen years after the first, just a year before the poet's death, which happened as the result of a painful internal disorder, when he was somewhat less than fifty-eight years old. It is recorded that throughout his life, with many anxieties, many disappointments, and very moderate means, he was always liberal and always cheerful, and distinguished, in his temper as in his poetry, for that geniality which is such a striking point in the national character, and greets us so charmingly in Plautus, in Horace, and in Boccaccio.

An exhaustive study of Italian poetry would dwell on Ariosto's minor poems, especially for the interesting details they give of his life; but the "*Orlando Furioso*," which he resolved to make and did make his masterpiece, is what ranks him with the immortals. It has endeared him to the hearts of all his countrymen, and has won no stinted praise from the greatest critics of all ages. It is no doubt far less known in America than the poems of Dante and of Petrarch, probably than that of Tasso, and perhaps those of later writers. It is not exactly in tune with the poetical fashion of the hour, which thinks it high criticism to say that Homer is not the perfection of poetry, and "*Marmion*" is not a poem at all, but a metrical romance. The only answer to all such fantasticalities is

to ask any one to read the "Orlando Furioso," and keep on reading it; it will take care of itself.

No poet ever came before the world in a more thrilling and inspiring age than Ariosto. The sixty years of his life, divided almost equally by the year 1500, were teeming with great men, great events, great designs, and great creations. It was the age when the old feudal monarchies, overawed by great nobles, were finally broken up, and the nations began to see themselves led by powerful individual monarchs. Men of dark craft, like Alexander VI, Henry VII, and Ferdinand of Spain, were giving place to the most brilliant and venturous of men,—Julius II, Maximilian, Henry VIII, and Francis I. The old Empire of the East had been shattered by the Turks twenty years before Ariosto was born; but from Constantinople had poured the flood of Greek learning, buried for centuries, and now going forth on the wings of the newly created press to regenerate mankind. It was the age of the real discoverer of America and Africa, Columbus and Cabot and Vespucci and Da Gama, whose colossal exploits we are now so absurdly undervaluing in order to crown with laurels the mythical Leif and Thorwald. It was the age of matchless splendor in art,—of Perugino and Raphael and Da Vinci. It was the age of resistless and aggressive thought,—of Luther and Savonarola. Moreover, as not all ages of

strong thought and strong action have been, it was an age of magnificence: men who were imagining and achieving high designs loved to exhibit their greatness in outward show. Brilliance—that is the word which most fitly describes the age when Ariosto was at the height of manhood. But brilliance may come from many causes. In some lands, the brilliance of 1500 was like the blaze of the sun; in some, it was the clear but artificial lustre of lamplight; in some, it was the gentle glory of the stars; in others, the weird coruscations of the Aurora Borealis—the sudden flash of the lightning, quenched as soon as seen; or perhaps the mystical splendor of the comet. But in Italy, with all the wealth and beauty of art and letters which lighted up the peninsula with a lustre not inferior to the days of Augustus, there was mingled the lurid, smoky glare of civil war. The genius of Italy has never been more splendid than in the days of Raphael and Ariosto,—her state rarely more contemptible than when Rome fell a prey to the renegade Bourbon, the hireling of Germany. Never had Italians put forth greater powers, and never were those powers so little exercised for the real good of Italy. The Grecian culture which possessed the rulers of Rome and Florence and the other great cities did not inspire them with a spark of Grecian patriotism or Grecian liberty. The Italian cities of the two centuries before had



almost revived, in their fiery factions, Athens and Thebes and Corinth, but the purple vision of Attie beauty in verse, in sculpture, and in thought that wrapped the Vatican breathed not one word of Aristides or Pericles or Epaminondas or Timoleon. It never once roused the Leos and Alfonsos to think that Greece had left them living likenesses of heroes worthier of imitation than dead marbles,—as their Cicero and their Tacitus might have taught them.

It is notable, therefore, when we consider Ariosto and the other poets of the later renaissance, to notice that, while they had all round them the full lustre of their age, it did not come to them instinct with the fire of enterprise which was felt by Germans, by Englishmen, by Frenchmen, even by Spaniards. They had before them the finest models of beauty and strength ever known; they were eager to rival, to outstrip their classic models; but the idea of creation, of giving the world something never suspected before, did not present itself to them. Even those who were full of native genius turned it into familiar channels. No one can read even a small part of the “Orlando Furioso” without recognizing Ariosto’s mighty genius,—inspiration which finds no parallel till we go back to Petrarch, who died just a century before Ariosto’s birth. Nay, we find none to surpass him till we

come to Dante fifty years earlier still. It seems, therefore, strange that he shows no desire to study out a new view, but, taking the epic of romance as he found it not only sketched but largely filled out by Pulci and Boiardo, to have set before himself no higher ambition than to do perfectly what they had done well.

The poem is on its face nothing but a sequel to Boiardo's "Orlando in Love." The persons of that poem are introduced as one's old friends; all its incidents are assumed to be known to all readers. One would suppose Ariosto meant no more than to complete a deeply interesting but unfinished story, in the spirit in which one of his contemporaries had added a thirteenth book to Virgil's "Æneid." Angelica, who has set all the world on fire with her beauty, is in the hands of Charlemagne. He has offered her as the prize to his two kinsmen—Orlando and Rinaldo—for whichever shall render the greatest service in the endless war against the Saracens. Angelica contrives to escape from both, the fact being that all the devotion which they and other perfect knights have shown her has flattered her vanity, but never touched her heart, and she dreads the thought of being tied for life to any man she has yet seen. She finds herself, after many strange adventures, living in rustic retirement outside the walls of Paris, which the Saracen army is besieging with no small success. In a wood

near their camp she comes upon a young warrior all but fatally wounded, and, with the medical knowledge ascribed to all great ladies of romance, cures him, loves him, marries him, and impels him to carve "Angelica and Medoro" on every tree and grotto near the retreat which holds them till he is well enough to be carried off to her Oriental kingdom. Orlando, who has searched half the world to find her, at length comes upon the forest which records so unmistakably what he deems her infidelity, and his reason sways and departs under the calamity. From this insanity of Orlando the poem is named; although Orlando's madness, the superhuman strength he derives from it, and the strange manner of its cure occupy a very small part of the forty-six cantos.

Nor in the further development of the story does there seem any very striking advance on the earlier romancists. The Saracen king of Africa has gathered a mighty force and driven the Christian armies within the walls of Paris. Thence, after a season of terrible pressure, the followers of Mohammed are thrown back upon Africa and ruined. Ruggiero, their youthful champion, is reclaimed to Christianity and at last married to the heroine, Bradamante, overthrowing, on the very eve of his marriage, the defiant and untamable king of Sarza, Rodomonte.

This is the merest thread of a narrative, in which

are entwined a thousand adventures and episodes, executed by a hundred knights and ladies, hermits and sorcerers, demons and angels, the very same whom we have met in Pulci, Boiardo, and Berni. From the Hebrides to the Mountains of the Moon, and from the Atlantic to the China Sea, there is not a country of Europe, Asia, or Africa which does not exhibit some event of prowess or horror. Nay, earth is not enough for the poet; the Paladin Astolfo, after riding through the air from France to Ethiopia on a brazen horse, is carried up in a winged chariot, under the escort of the Evangelist St. John, to the sphere of the moon, where he sees many strange things and obtains the remedy for the restoration of Orlando.

But not content with transferring wholesale to his own pages the work of contemporary romancists, Ariosto borrows, steals, robs, without shame from Homer and Virgil, Catullus and Ovid, any episode he likes, altering them to suit himself, careless of what becomes of the original spirit. Ulysses in the Cyclops' cave, Nisus and Euryalus attacking the hostile camp, Andromeda rescued from the monster by Perseus, are all exploited under the names of the knights and dames who thronged the court of Charlemagne. What claim has such a plagiarist to be thought an original genius?

It is the claim of genius itself,—that indefinable power which, as Voltaire said, reclaims its own wher-

ever it finds it; the power by which Virgil raised the flames of Troy out of the ashes of dead poets whom we only know as supplying his material; the power that gave a livelier life to Plutarch's Coriolanus and Cleopatra, and turned the garrulous chronicles into Macbeth and Lear; the power which made even Isaiah's seraph and Ezekiel's chariot blaze with a diviner splendor in the burning lines of "Paradise Lost."

As Pulci and Boiardo handled the romances, their tone, whether gay or grave, is at once tedious and rambling; neither seems to have any hold upon his subject. He may run on till one thinks he will never stop, or he may break off in the abruptest of transitions with no definite purpose; he may dwell upon minute details, or he may hurry on at a breathless rate. In one, egregious absurdities will be told without a smile; in the other the most revered objects will be discussed with a horse-laugh. The people go through all their performances in one tone, either of solemnity or of jocosity, so that one would not be greatly surprised to find Orlando's speeches transferred to Brandimarte, or Bradamante's to Angelica; but that the poets have seen fit to discriminate some by the coarsest labelling, so that Margutte and Rodomonte harp each on one string and are characters only by being puppets. The verse is often very expressive, but in Pulci it is so buried in local dialect that it

must go hard, even with Italians, to read it; and Boiardo's avoidance of all meddly might entitle him to be named Richard Wagner. In this respect, as in almost every other, Berni gave Boiardo what he needed, and deservedly superseded him; but of all these romancists, while they possessed unquestioned talents, those talents hardly ever raised them above earth,—poets they undoubtedly are, and worth reading,—but not of the highest order.

But with Ariosto we find ourselves lifted into another sphere. Everything is controlled by that wonderful gift of genius, which, like his own Astolfo, carried by his winged courser over sea and land, is all the time holding the steed in check by the inspired dictates of a more than human power. His hand on that courser's rein is always firm but always light. As soon as anything tends to be tedious—and in romances this must be—we are gently reminded of old friends whom we have not forgotten, and enticed away to a fresh series of adventures among new lands and persons that we cannot help following. Wild as these adventures are, beyond the bounds of nature, space, and time, they are made to amuse without disgusting us, and thrill without shocking us,—there is no attempt to make them natural or probable, but they seem so thoroughly appropriate, that we read about them with something of the pleasure wherewith the

people of four centuries before Ariosto heard of them. His knights and ladies are men and women,—in the midst of their enchantments, their ministering angels, and malignant demons, they have all the fears and hopes, the loves and hates, of Italians in 1500, or Americans in 1900. It seems to me Macaulay is entirely wrong when he groups the “*Orlando Furioso*” with the “*Arabian Nights*” as the story of people for whom nobody cares. We do care; Orlando and Rinaldo, Angelica and Marfisa, Rodomonte and Sobrino, Fiordeligi and Bradamante, are every one people we can truly love or hate, and rejoice to see triumphant or defeated.

Another great charm of Ariosto is his enlivening every part of his story with episodes, longer or shorter, aside from the main narrative. The battles and sorcery of the romances are inevitably monotonous; they recur again and again with almost the same detail; it is an inheritance from their infancy. But Ariosto turns away whenever old friends begin to tire, and tells us stories which do not belong specially to days of chivalry, but to the wars and loves of all time. As I have said, he does not hesitate to draw these from all sources, especially the classic poets, but always with such variations and touches of his own that the inventors would have thanked him for the plagiarism. Take, for instance, the episode of Nisus and Euryalus,

wherewith Virgil has drawn out the tears of over fifty generations,—the two young warriors who go by night through the hostile camp, and are overtaken and slain successively, the elder being unwilling to leave the younger to his fate. In Virgil they go to find their absent chief; in Ariosto they go on the more sacred errand of rescuing their chief's body for burial; and on their return and disastrous arrest, the younger, Medoro, is not dead, but only left for dead, is found, healed, and loved by the heroine, and passes into the main narrative, creating the crisis of the plot.

But Ariosto does not have to borrow and embellish all his episodes. His own creations are rich and suggestive in the extreme. The pagan hero Ruggiero, who is destined to become a Christian, has been brought up by a magician, to whom the stars have revealed the fate of the ward whom he loves more than his life. He knows it is useless to fight with destiny; yet he follows his darling boy everywhere, staving off, by successive magic devices, the catastrophe that he knows he cannot avert. One of these devices is a castle, to which all the chief persons of the poem are successively lured; as soon as each draws near its walls, he or she sees leaning from the windows the beloved face, and hears calling the beloved voice of the heart's darling, woman or man, whoever it may be. Then entering, they wander from room to room,



and storey to storey, everywhere hearing, sometimes seeing, what is the only being in the world for them. It is all a delusion: the beloved are not there; but their lovers pass each other unconscious in this endless quest, no one ever aware that he is only one of a crowd, and a crowd of his best friends, all imprisoned here by a fruitless search, which they pursue day and night, not heeding food nor sleep. This exquisitely suggestive picture is drawn out at just enough length to make the reader feel all its plaintive meaning.

An earlier adventure of Ruggiero is where he is entrapped into the gardens of the enchantress Alcina. This witch seduces one gallant after another with resistless charms till she is tired of them, when they are changed to varied forms, to give place to new favorites. So much is old; but Ariosto's addition, derived perhaps from ancient fairy legends, is that it is all unreal; mere glistening show; and as soon as the talisman is brought near, which dissolves enchantment, the falsity of Alcina and her garden appears.

Another singularly bold and original incident is probably better known than any other in the poem. The madness of Orlando has proved a serious blow to the Christians' cause, not merely from the loss of his irresistible prowess, but from the ravages he causes in every country where his rage takes him. It is intimated that if Astolfo will betake himself on his flying

horse to the Christian king of Ethiopia, a way of restoration will be indicated. This he does, and rescues the monarch from the harpies, an incident deliberately borrowed from Greek mythology. From there he makes his way to the earthly Paradise, which is, with him, on a mountain near the equator, not, as with Dante, begirt by the Antarctic Ocean. Here he is met by the venerable form of St. John the Evangelist, who shows him many marvels, and then takes him up on a chariot of fire to the sphere of the moon. Here he sees still stranger sights, one of which sets forth in a beautiful allegory the victory of Time over Fame, on which Petrarch had dwelt. But it seems that the moon is a repository of all sorts of things that had been lost, or intangible on earth. It is here that Ariosto gives way to very bold satire, especially directed at courts and courtiers, the bitterest stroke of which is one translated by Milton. It is well known that the popes claimed the territory round Rome, which they called St. Peter's Patrimony, not from the historic grant of Charlemagne, but from a purely fictitious donation of Constantine to Pope Silvester. On the basis of this forgery, which no one dared to dispute, the popes were claiming vastly extended sovereignty, and in Ariosto's time the infamous Cæsar Borgia, acting for his no less infamous father, Alexander VI, invaded Ariosto's native town in Romagna, to

make it his own. Therefore among the things found in the moon, but non-existent on earth, which Astolfo saw, led by St. John, Ariosto places (in Milton's version) :

Then came they to a hill of lively green,  
Which once smelt sweet, now stinks as wondrously;  
This is the gift, if you the cause will have,  
Which Constantine to good Silvester gave.

It is here that there are bottled up the wits of every man on earth who cannot take charge of them himself. Astolfo is allowed to take his own bottle, and also Orlando's fuller one, and after his return to earth and to the Christian army, Orlando, whose naked rage has brought him to the same place, is forcibly roped, thrown down, his mouth shut, and the bottle of his reason applied to his nostrils. It is duly snuffed in, and he recovers his sanity.

This story is told with absolute seriousness, as one among many other superhuman occurrences, yet not with Boiardo's gravity. For Ariosto's exquisite humor is one of his countless gifts. It is rarely rollicking like Pulci's, or satirical like that of Berni, though he has flashes of both tempers; but is directly inherited from Boccaccio. There is one long story of an earlier Astolfo, the Gothic king of Lombardy, which is introduced in no true connection with the plot, and might have come straight out of the Decameron.

But Ariosto's humor is an advance on his masters'. We see it more in the sly and unexpected hits thrown in from time to time in narratives which Boiardo's solemnity and Pulci's buffoonery would have made tedious,—the humor of a man who, when he has completed a serious piece of work, can stand off, and, with an impartial spectator's eye, detect an absurdity in his own performance. For instance, where he borrows from Ovid the story of Perseus and Andromeda, Angelica is kidnapped and carried to the Hebrides, where, according to a very common myth, a maiden must be exposed every day to a sea-monster to atone for a national crime. She is tied to a rock in the dress of Countess Godiva on her ride in Coventry. She is duly rescued and, as soon as may be, reclothed. But months after, wishing to reward a worthy shepherd who had helped along her marriage with Medoro, she gives him a costly coronet which she had brought from her father's court in China and always kept with her in all her wanderings. "But where she kept it," says Ariosto, "when she was chained naked to the rock, I cannot tell." This humor reminds one of many of the best things in Shakespeare; it is perhaps more like some things in Addison, Goldsmith, or Irving; but it is most of all like the humor of Sir Walter Scott, who is always dealing sly digs at his own stateliest heroes.

The verse of Ariosto is absolutely perfect for his subject: it is melodious, yet not luscious; free, yet not slovenly; manly, yet not austere. Only Homer ever applied to a great body of poetry a measure more perfectly wedding sound to sense. Virgil, Dante, and Milton have lavished without exhausting the resources of equally noble combinations on loftier and deeper themes. But Ariosto, in his way, is as perfect as they are in theirs. In my opinion, he surpasses his countryman Tasso and his legitimate heir, Spenser. Dryden might have matched, nay, have surpassed him, on the very same subjects, but alas! as Scott has said:

a ribald king and court  
 Bade him toil on, to make them sport;  
 Demanded, for their niggard pay,  
 Fit for their souls, a lighter lay;  
 The world, defrauded of the high design,  
 Profaned the God-given strength and marred the lofty line.

But if I am asked whether "Elaine" and "Guinevere" do not present an equally rich and varied measure wedded to an equally charming theme by an equally great poet, I reply, "No! No!! No!!!"

Of style, that strange element neither matter nor verse, yet linked with both, so easy to recognize, so elusive to define, Ariosto, like many great poets, is a master whose mastery we can scarcely analyze. It is rich both in description and in imagination, the natu-

ral product of a magnificent age. It fulfils most of Matthew Arnold's characteristics of Homer,—it is rapid, direct in thought and direct in construction; but it cannot accurately be called the grand style. The paramount necessity in a poet of romance is to be lively:

Tout genre est permis, hors le genre ennuyeux;  
and this necessity Ariosto fulfils even where, as in describing the funeral procession of Brandimarte, he must be serious in tone.

In contrasting Ariosto with modern poets, it is especially interesting to note the details of his descriptions. Everything which the hand of man has wrought—everything in the way of dress, of armor, of architecture—is detailed with keenness and precision. But when he speaks of natural scenery, it is all in general. His fields, his forests, his mountains, his rivers, are merely the background to his men and women, affording them difficulties to surmount or retreats to enjoy. The prying and poking into the details of clouds, brooks, hillsides, weeds, insects—the botanical, anatomical, and physiological poetry of Wordsworth and his successors, where everything inanimate thinks and feels, and only man is dumb while celandines and beetles talk—would be far too profound for such a simple, untrained soul as the author of the “Orlando Furioso.” A primrose by the river's brim a yellow

primrose would have been to him—and, candidly, is it anything more?

There is one remarkable field of outdoor observation where Ariosto pour out all the stores of eye and thought. The terrors and triumphs of a storm at sea are described by him again and again, and make us realize vividly at once the dangers and the courage of the Mediterranean mariners in the long centuries when three hundred tons made a very large ship—as it was in our grandfathers' day.

The way in which Ariosto speaks of women is a very curious part of his work. In no great narrative poem do women play a larger and, in general, a more creditable part. He has a very few female scamps; but far the larger number of his heroines are charming, dignified, tender, and intelligent persons, who would improve any world where they lived. But every now and then he breaks off and addresses the ladies in general in a half-bantering, half-respectful strain, which must have been read by the women of his day with mingled pleasure and resentment. More than once he mentions great ladies of his time with supreme respect, as models of all the graces and virtues, and among them one of whom Victor Hugo's very unfavorable portrait has had in our day far more weight than Ariosto's eulogy—Lucrezia Borgia.

He begins his last canto by telling us that as he now

finds himself coming into harbor after a long voyage, he can see assembled on the bank to greet him a great array of illustrious men and women, whose names he recounts in a catalogue drawn up in an overflowing spirit of generosity; there have rarely been nobler tributes paid by a great poet to distinguished contemporaries.

And this suggests the one serious fault which must be found in his poem. The narrative is interrupted with repeated descriptions and eulogies of the military and civic prowess of the Duke of Ferrara and his kinsmen of the house of Este; and several times the prophetic legacies of Merlin are invoked to portray, at endless length, the descent, partly historical, but chiefly mythical, of this house of Este, through Ruggiero and Bradamante, a hero and heroine of the poem, from Hector of Troy. Now there is no doubt that Ariosto's duke did distinguish himself in the campaigns of Francis I in northern Italy; but those campaigns conferred little credit on any one concerned; and one might be pretty well read in the history of France and Germany, Gaston de Foix and Bayard, without ever hearing of Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara. But stanza after stanza is poured out in genealogical and monarchical panegyrics which would have almost seemed fulsome to James I and Lewis XIV—and Ariosto must go into the list of those who



have sunk the noblest genius in the adulation of a courtier. Spenser went painfully near to the same thing in the "Faërie Queene," but Milton did not seek to buy refuge from poverty or obloquy by putting Prince Rupert's pedigree into his poems. It must be said that in this particular flattery Ariosto had Boiardo for his pioneer and poor Tasso for his imitator.

In sum: the "Orlando" is like a vast demesne; it has bits of wild wood where lurk strange beasts, and denizens more savage still; but it has store of ancestral trees, velvet lawns, trim gardens, sparkling fountains, and stately halls. It is filled with gallant knights on gallant steeds, gorgeous dames and lovely maidens, singing songs of love and war that never tire, and all overhung with the matchless sky of Italy, revealing at times glimpses of the sacred mountains under skies more glorious still.

The following extracts may give an idea of the infinite variety of theme which the poem presents; the first illustrates Ariosto's power of making deep feeling tremble on the edge of burlesque.

O the great goodness of the knights of old!  
Rivals were these, and differing in belief;  
And felt themselves by cruel blows untold  
Through all their members still in pain and grief.  
Yet through the winding paths and darkening wold  
Together went, as each were other's chief;  
And with four spurs they pricked the courser's sides  
Till he arrived at where the road divides.

## A description of the knave Brunello:

His height, to give you indication true,  
Is not six palms, and frizzled is his head;  
His hair is black, and swarthy is his hue,  
Pallid his face, with beard unduly fed;  
His eyes are swollen: only one can view;  
Broken his nose, with shaggy brow o'erspread;  
His carriage, if the man I paint in one,  
Is close and short and looks alert to run.

## A bit of scenery of ideal beauty:

Of fragrant laurel trees were charming bowers,  
Of palms and of the loveliest myrtle there,  
Cedars and oranges with fruit and flowers,  
Entwined in varied forms, which all were fair;  
Gave with their thick shade from the scorching powers  
In summer days delectable repair;  
And through the branches moved with careless flight,  
Pouring their song, the minstrels of the night.

Through crimson roses and through lilies white,  
Their bloom the genial breeze renewing oft,  
Coneys and hares played wantonly in sight,  
And deer that reared their haughty heads aloft;  
Fearless of hunters' bolt or captive plight,  
Feeding or standing on the herbage soft,  
Sportive and swift went bounding goat and roe  
That in these favored fields abundant grow.

## Ruggiero is discovered in the garden of Alcina:

Alone she found him as she sought to find,  
Rejoicing in the morning bright and cool,  
Beside a stream that, where the hill inclined,  
Ran downward towards a clear and gentle pool.

The delicate, soft weeds that round him wind  
 Were all of wantonness and leisure full;  
 Which all of silk and gold laborious wove  
 Alcina's hand had wrought to deck her love.

A splendid collar, set with jewels sheen,  
 Hung from his neck, and half adown his breast;  
 And either arm, that manly once had been,  
 Was by a brilliant binding circlet pressed;  
 And piercing both his ears, a thread was seen  
 Of finest gold, in form a ring confessed;  
 And two great pearls were hanging thence in view—  
 Such Araby and India never knew.

All dripping were the ringlets of his hair  
 With sweetest scents, whose value none may say;  
 Amorous was all his mien, like those who care  
 To serve beneath Valencian ladies' sway.  
 His name alone of soundness kept a share;  
 Tainted was all the rest, and in decay.  
 Thus lost Ruggiero was recovered,—so,  
 So changed from himself by magic and brought low.

### Various comparisons:

Like to a child that puts a fruit away  
 When ripe, and then forgets where it is stored,  
 If it should chance that after many a day  
 Thither his step returns where is his hoard,  
 He wonders to behold it in decay,  
 Rotten and spoiled, and richness all outpoured;  
 And what he loved of old with keen delight  
 He hates, spurns, loathes, and flings away in spite.

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And as we see two dogs the combat wage,  
 Whether by envy moved, or other hate,  
 Approaching whet the teeth, nor yet engage,  
 With eyes askance, and red as coals in grate,

Then to their biting come, on fire with rage,  
With bitter cries, and backs with spite elate,  
So came with swords and cries and many a taunt  
Circassia's knight and he of Chiaramont.

---

E'en such a battle makes a daring fly  
Against the mastiff in the August dust,  
Or in September, or perhaps July,  
The one of grain, the other full of must;  
Now stings him in the snout, now in the eye,  
Flies all around, and fills him with disgust,  
That often makes his teeth to snap for gall,—  
But if one blow can reach, it pays for all.

The coming on of Orlando's madness:

Never to weep, to wail he never stayed,  
Nor respite gave himself by night or day;  
Cities and towns he fled; in forest glade  
Upon the hard ground all uncovered lay.  
He wondered at himself: how in his head  
A living fount of water seemed to play,  
And how such heavy sighs his breast could know,  
And oft himself addressed amid the flow:

“These are no longer tears that from my eyes  
In such a copious flood incessant stream;  
Their gush no solace to my grief supplies:  
It stops when at their height my sorrows seem;  
The well of life from my dead bosom flies  
Straight to the path where strikes the visual beam,  
And is that which it pours, and draws in one  
My life and grief until their course be run.

“These that afford the witness of my woe,  
These are not sighs; sighs are not such as these;  
These have a truce at last; I never know  
That from my heart less strong the torture flees;

The love that fires my breast, upon the glow,  
Is beating with his wings, to make this breeze;  
How canst thou, love, contrive this wondrous doom  
To hold it in the flame, and ne'er consume?

“I am not, I am not what I appear.

What was Orlando lies in death below,  
Slain most unkindly by his lady dear,  
Who by her breach of faith is made his foe;  
I am his parted ghost that wander here,  
Here in this hell lamenting him I go,  
That his poor shade, when all beside is dust,  
May warning be to those in love who trust.”

All night throughout the forest strayed the count,  
And till the breaking of the morning's flame;  
Then cruel fortune led him to the fount  
Whereon Medoro carved his lady's shame;  
To see his wrong full written on the mount  
Kindled him so, each drop within his frame  
To hatred, madness, wrath and fury flew;  
Without delay forthwith his sword he drew.

He cut the writing and the stone and sent  
Their smallest fragments in a heavenward flight.  
Ill-starred the cave, and every tree, that lent  
Medoro chance Angelica to write;  
So from that day no more their cooling tent  
Or flock or shepherd might again invite,  
And that clear water that had been so pure  
From such untempered wrath was ill secure.

For boughs and stocks and stump and clod and stone  
He ceased not in those lovely waves to fling,  
Till all from top to bed so foul had grown  
Clearness and purity had left the spring.  
And weak at length, with sweat all vigor gone,  
Now that exhausted breath no force could bring

To answer hate, contempt and burning ire,  
To earth he fell, and seemed he must expire.

Broken and weak, he fell upon the plain,  
And fixed his eyes to heaven and made no sound;  
From food and sleep alike did he refrain,  
While thrice the sun rose and went under ground;  
Nor ever ceased to wax his bitter pain,  
Till it had led him out of reason's bound.  
On the fourth day, with mighty madness stung,  
Both plate and mail from off his back he flung.

Here lay his helm, and there his buckler lay,  
His harness far, his hauberk farther yet;  
All of his arms, their fate in sum I say,  
A different lodgment through the wood did get;  
Tearing his garments then, he shown to day  
His shaggy belly, back and breast he let:  
And the great frenzy started, horrible,  
That greater none will ever have to tell.

Such rage, such fury was at last revealed  
That darkling he remained in every sense.  
He did not think his sword in hand to wield,  
Which had, I ween, showed wondrous skill of fence;  
But neither brand, nor axe, nor mace to yield  
Aid was there needed for his force immense;  
Proof after proof his mighty prowess spoke,  
A lofty pine uprooting with one stroke.

And after that uprooting many more,  
As they were stalks of fennel or of dill;  
Tall oaks and aged elms away he tore,  
Beech, fir, and holm and rowan from the hill;  
Just as the fowler, when the meadow floor  
Clearing, will use to fix his nets with skill  
Nettles and reeds and stubble of the wold,  
He handled oaks and forest monarchs old.

The miraculous fleet (Rose's translation) :

Astolpho leading such a countless band  
 As might have well seven Africas opprest,  
 And recollecting 'twas the saint's command,  
 Who upon him whilere imposed the quest,  
 That fair Provence and Aquamorta's strand  
 He from the reaving Saracen should wrest,  
 Made through his numerous host a second draught  
 Of such as least inapt for sea he thought;

And filling next as full as they could be  
 His hands with many different sorts of leaves,  
 Plucked from palm, olive, bay, and cedar tree,  
 Approached the shore, and cast them on the waves.  
 O blessed souls! O great felicity!  
 O grace, which rarely man from God receives!  
 O strange and wondrous miracle, which sprung  
 Out of those leaves upon the waters flung!

They wax in number beyond all esteem;  
 Becoming crooked and heavy, long, and wide;  
 Into hard timber turn and solid beam,  
 The slender veins that branch on either side:  
 Taper the masts; and, moored in the salt stream,  
 All in a thought transformed to vessels, ride;  
 And of as diverse qualities appear  
 As are the plants whereon they grew whilere.

It was a miracle to see them grown  
 To galliot, galley, frigate, ship, and boat;  
 Wondrous that they with tackling of their own  
 Are found as well as any barks afloat.  
 Nor lack there men to govern them, when blown  
 By blustering winds, from islands not remote—  
 Sardinia or Corsica—of every rate,  
 Pilot and patron, mariner and mate.

## CHAPTER IV

VITTORIA COLONNA—MICHAEL ANGELO—TASSO

I HAVE mentioned the emphatic way in which Ariosto more than once speaks of the illustrious women of his own time. In one place, particularly, he asks himself whether he shall name all who are worthy, or select some one for especial praise, and answers:

One will I choose; and one shall be my choice

Who beyond envy hath herself so raised  
That none of all can lift approving voice,  
Though left unnamed, while she alone is praised.  
Nor she alone doth from her verse rejoice

In deathless fame, since sweeter ne'er was phrased;  
But all of whom he deigns to speak or write  
She saves from death, set in eternal light.

As Phœbus makes his sister brighter far

With ampler lustre, and to him more dear  
Than Venus, Pleiades, or other star

Which turns with heaven, or keeps its proper sphere;  
So wit he breathes, above all dames that are,

To her I mean, and song more sweet to hear,  
And such a force to her high words hath given  
That like another sun she gilds our heaven.

Victoria is she named, and rightly, born

'Mid victories, and if she walk or stand,  
Triumphs and trophies all her life adorn,  
And victories troop with her on either hand.



This panegyric, exalting one woman above all others of her time, is echoed by every writer of the age. The subject of it is Vittoria Colonna, a daughter of the princely Roman house so dear to Petrarch. Her life extended from 1490 to 1547, just overlapping at both ends that of King Henry VIII of England, who very possibly asked her to marry him, though this is not recorded. Her father, with the easy loyalty of his century, had passed from the service of the French king to that of Ferdinand of Aragon, and had become closely allied with the Marquess of Pescara, one of the Spanish generals. They cemented their friendship by betrothing the marquess's eldest son to Vittoria, then five years old. The marriage was celebrated in 1509, the year when Henry VIII came to the throne. Marriages at that day were arranged with no reference to the inclinations of the parties; but in this instance, at least, the testimony is unanimous that these two noble persons loved each other truly, and were famed throughout Italy as unrivalled in lineage, beauty, wealth, and accomplishments. Their home was Naples, whence they constantly resorted to the romantic island of Ischia. Here they gathered round them a brilliant company of warriors, statesmen, philosophers, and poets, as well as the first ladies of Naples and Sicily. Among these was Bernardo Tasso, famous father of a more

famous son, who perhaps will forgive me for not dwelling on his hundred-canto romance of "Amadigi di Gaula" if I insert his sonnet to Ischia :

O haughty cliff, whose fair and stately height  
As home so many chiefs and heroes claim,  
Whence rays of glory send afar their flame  
That render dark and dim all other light;—  
If through true virtue man may soar aright  
To perfect happiness and endless fame,  
Those souls than others worthier of the name  
Will go who in thy rocky breast delight.  
The blaze of arms is thine; and in thee hide  
Chaste beauty, valor, and high courtesy,  
As great as heaven can give or time behold.  
The fates be friendly to thee; wind and tide  
Afford thee honor; and thy native sea  
Breathe ever gently tempered heat and cold.

From this retreat Vittoria was roused by the campaigns in the north of Italy between the emperor and Lewis XII, where her husband acted as general of the light cavalry, and shared in the rout of Ravenna, where he was made prisoner. In his long absences at the war, his wife's chief interest was in the exchange of letters; but she gave much time to literature and the like pursuits, while the force and beauty of her character impressed every one who came near her. In particular her influence over the young Marquess of Vasto, a near kinsman of her husband, whose wild and frivolous youth she absolutely made over into all that was interesting and

promising, almost consoled her for having no children of her own.

Her husband, after his release from captivity, continued to distinguish himself as a soldier. After the rout of Francis I at Pavia, the Italian princes who had called in the emperor as their ally began to think one foreign ruler as oppressive as another, and tried to enlist Pescara on their side by the offer of the crown of Naples. The offer, so tempting, and by no means visionary, might have been accepted had not Vittoria Colonna written to him to maintain that virtue and true faith which he had sworn to Charles V, his natural sovereign, and which raised him above kings. Pescara soon died of his wounds at Milan, where his wife had failed to reach him in time. She returned to Naples, buried in grief, which she sought to express in verses to which she largely devoted her time. They are chiefly sonnets, much in the style of Petrarch, but most remarkable for the firm and masculine tone both of the eulogy and the regrets, free from the lackadaisical air to which Petrarch is too prone. She resisted all proposals to leave her widowhood, though strongly urged to by her brothers, being much under forty years of age, beautiful, noble, accomplished, and courted even by princes. After the lapse of about seven years, her mind opened as it had not yet done to religious influence. Her poetry at once assumed

a higher and richer tone, and her acquaintance, always charming, began to exercise a marvellous effect upon all who knew her. She lived much at Rome, but life for a Colonna was not always easy there, for that house was the head of a turbulent faction, leagued with the foes of Pope Clement VII. She, therefore, more than once took shelter in a convent, and towards the end of her life wrote none but sacred poetry. She died early in 1547, leaving an absolutely unequalled reputation for every high quality that can adorn a great lady, all the most illustrious men of the day contending to exalt her in terms which the severest criticism has been unable to say is exaggerated. I quote two sonnets, one from her earlier and one from her later life. The first is addressed to Charles V, telling him with a good deal of haughtiness how much he owed to Pescara's services:

Thy haughty eagle on my glorious sun  
Fixing her eyes, high o'er the vulgar crowd  
Attained its goal, and doubling glad and proud  
Her pinions' stroke the fiery sphere had won;  
But now her chosen orb its course hath run,  
Veiled and obscured for us by densest cloud,  
See how her former aim is drooped and bowed;  
Her bold flight keeps not as it had begun.  
The crowns, the trophies of each high emprise,  
Dispel the night which dark all else hath made,  
Borne back with glory in his blazing ray,  
That blaze hath broader, since his latest day  
He closed in splendor; but it blinds her eyes—  
She spreads her wings, but lingers in the shade.

Few changes of style can be greater than to her later tone; one can see how her retreat at Isehia struck the note for the following:

When swells the angry ocean, and surrounds  
With force and rage some firmly rooted rock,  
If steadfast that shall prove, the boastful shock  
Breaks, and the waves fall back within their bounds.  
So I, if I behold the flood profound  
Of worldly wrath assail me with its mock,  
I lift my eyes to heaven, and rout the flock  
Of waves on waves the thicker they abound.  
And if perchance the blast of passion's voice  
Threatens new warfare, speed me to the land,  
And with the cord of love, that faith hath twined  
To him in whom I trust my skiff I bind,  
Jesus, the living rock; and I rejoice  
That when I will, my harbor is at hand.

Among the countless poems addressed to Vittoria Colonna is one in which the author declares she has absolutely made him over again, and recreated him to a higher life, as follows:

When once designs the perfect, godlike art  
The form and guise of any man to hold,  
Then from mean substance and in simple mould  
Doth life to thought at its first birth impart,—  
A second birth from marble makes it start  
Completed promise of the chisel bold,  
Whence born again, and by no death controlled,  
Beauty and force are its immortal part.  
So my own model was I born at first,  
Myself my pattern; to be born again  
Through thy perfecting work, O dame benign.  
If thou my fulness fill, and slake my thirst  
In pity, oh, what torture will be mine  
If thou my blind and empty thought disdain.

The author of this sonnet was Michael Angelo Buonarroto, who, when admitted to the society of Vittoria Colonna, declared in plain prose what these verses imply, that she recreated him and inspired in his life a sense of higher things, and of responsibility in their search which it never had felt before.

Michael Angelo was born in the same year as Ariosto, and died in 1563, the year before the birth of Shakespeare. A course on Italian poetry must never omit his name, though it is no place for a survey of his works. His poetry, like that of so many Italians, is founded on the model of Petrarch, in sonnets and madrigals, a somewhat indefinite name for short poems in lines of varying length and combination of rhyme. But Michael Angelo could not be a copyist of Petrarch, or, indeed, of anybody. His poetry has much the same traits as his sculpture: loftiness of design, an intense love of beauty, somewhat injured by the artist's absorption in his own skill, so that we rather admire the craft of the designer than the result of his labor, and sometimes find that result obscure; and, more than all, a prevailing air of withdrawal from the crowd, of self-contained contemplation, for which I could almost bear to use the detestable modern word "aloofness." This air is, of course, wholly alien to Petrarch or Ariosto or Chaucer or Spenser; Michael Angelo derived it from Dante and

passed it on to Milton, though its first and greatest exponent is Æschylus. Space forbids my quoting him at any length; perhaps as good a specimen as any is his sonnet on his master, Dante:

To the blind gulfs from earth he passed, and when  
The first and second hells he saw, to God  
Led by his mighty thought the way he trod  
Alive, revealing the true light to men.  
Star of high worth, which to our blinded ken  
With his bright rays eternal secrets showed,  
And found the prize at last, full oft bestowed  
On noblest heroes by this sinful den.  
Right hardly was the work of Dante known,  
And noble passion, by the ungrateful crowd,  
Which fails in greeting to the just alone.  
Yet were I such, such fate to me allowed  
For his rough exile, were his virtue mine,  
The happiest lot on earth would I resign.

At the time Vittoria Colonna died, the reign of romantic poetry was drawing to a close, and Michael Angelo entirely outlived it. Italy was undergoing a great change; the soldier was falling and the churchman rising in the popular mind. The rapid triumphs of the Reformation had shown that neither a fighting pope like Julius II nor a literary pope like Leo X was the man for the times. A succession of popes, the Pauls and Piuses, came to the Vatican, who in various ways grappled with the problem how to regain for the church something of what she had lost. Under such influences a different tone was sure

to be heard among the poets of the age. Vittoria Colonna and Michael Angelo might well afford by their lives and by their writings the spark to kindle into poetic enthusiasm the growing sentiment of religion; and the leader was ready in the person of him for whom was repeated the fate of Dante as told in Buonarroti's sonnet,—poor, glorious Torquato Tasso. Tasso had all Dante's nobility without his stern elevation of character. His poem, if it did not reveal eternal secrets to the eyes of men, awoke holy emotions in their bosoms, and the reward he received was even less deserved and more bitter than Dante's bread with smack of salt, and stairs steep to climb in the houses of others.

I have spoken more than once of Bernardo Tasso, the author of "*Amadis of Gaul*," a poet of some merit, but who, standing as he does between Ariosto and his own son, is no longer a great light in Italian literature. Torquato was born at Sorrento on the 11th of March, 1544, and died at Rome on the 25th of April, 1595. His birth was nine and his death five years earlier than those of Edmund Spenser. On the influence of beautiful and romantic scenery in childhood I think a great deal of sentimental nonsense has been written: but if ever early surroundings did make a poet it would be those on which Tasso's eyes first opened. Sorrento is the loveliest spot on earth,



be the second where it may. But we might say that Tasso's birthplace was the only fortunate thing in his life. In his childhood his father left his home, out of loyalty to a friend who had been exiled for a political uprising, and departed with him to the court of France, as a result of which Bernardo Tasso was deprived of his property and his civic rights. Torquato remained with his mother to be educated at a Jesuit school, where he showed great proficiency and won his teachers' warm regard. His father took the liveliest interest in his education, and was kept informed of its details. At length, when Torquato was about twelve, Bernardo, who had led a wandering life for years, took up his abode at Rome, under the protection of Cardinal d'Este. But affairs at Torquato's home were most sad. His mother had in vain tried to obtain her own property when her husband's was confiscated; her brothers had treated her with injustice and even with cruelty, reducing her to such distress that she was forced to send her son away to his father at Rome, a separation which proved to be final. Under Bernardo's authority, Torquato continued his education in various cities: at Bergamo, where the family had its origin, at Urbino, at Venice, and at Rome, it being the old story of a boy whose father would make him a lawyer while nature made him a poet. At Venice he had studied with great

delight the writings of Petrarch and Ariosto, and had been fired with a passion to emulate the latter. Accordingly, when not eighteen, he composed a romantic poem called "Rinaldo," which convinced his father, when read in manuscript, that his son was born to succeed him as a poet, and he was left to follow his bent. The poem was published, and had a wide circulation, making Tasso's name favorably known.

The house of Este, Duke of Ferrara, still retained the preëminence among the princely families of Italy which it had had in the days of Ariosto. Bernardo Tasso and his son entered the service of the Cardinal d'Este just as the duke was about to celebrate his marriage with the daughter of the emperor, and Torquato was dazzled and overwhelmed by the splendid ceremonies. He conceived a strange devotion to the court, which remained with him in spite of many wrongs. The cardinal being called to a conclave, Tasso was free from even the slight obligations of his service, and occupied himself much with poetry and philosophy, but chiefly in cultivating the favor of the duke and his sisters, Lucrezia and Leonora d'Este. They were naturally attracted by the reputation of the young poet, whose bodily strength, charming manners, varied accomplishments, and open disposition never failed to win him friends, and through them he was brought prominently to the notice of Duke Alfonso. He heard that Tasso had made consid-

erable progress in an epic poem on the capture of Jerusalem in the first Crusade, and brought him under the notice of the most distinguished men of his court. Tasso, who was the most sensitive of men, whether to kindness or injury, determined to introduce, as hero of the Crusade, Rinaldo, a supposed ancestor of the duke's, thereby following Ariosto's example, but with more dignity and less tediousness of detail.

In 1569 he was called from Ferrara by his father's last sickness and death, which he was just in time to witness, returning immediately to the court. In the next year the Princess Lucrezia was married to the Duke of Urbino, and Leonora, losing her chief companion, was led more and more to cultivate the society of Tasso. To her he communicated the first cantos of his poem. These contain the famous episode of Sophronia and Olindo, in which the consuming love that dreads expression is exhibited with so much vividness that the great majority of mankind will always believe that Tasso was telling his own story of the mighty passion that was growing up in him for the great lady. By the rigid laws of court usage he never could think of marrying her, and she probably never dreamed of him except as a most respectable and interesting companion for her vacant hours:

Something better than her dog, a little dearer than her  
horse.

But whether he did love her, how much he loved her, and whether any one else knew of his love are still unsolved problems.

In the same year Tasso went with Cardinal d'Este to the court of Charles IX at Paris, where he was received with great honor, and offered rich gifts which he declined to accept; but later he lost the favor of the cardinal by expressing his indignation at the massacre of St. Bartholomew and obtained leave of absence, which he spent at Rome, where Leonora was visiting. By her mediation he passed from one brother's service to another's, and received a pension from Alfonso on very liberal terms. He now gave his best energies to perfecting his great epic; but chancing to hear a now forgotten poem of the pastoral form, he composed, in the space of two months, his "*Aminta*," the first pastoral of any value. It was performed in 1573 at Ferrara with brilliant success, and, when printed eight years later, took Italy by storm.

In 1575 the "*Gerusalemme*" was at last completed, but before giving it to the world he submitted it to the judgment of his friends, and revised it again and again by their suggestions. These suggestions, of course, as anybody but poor Tasso would have anticipated, consisted in pulling it to pieces from end to end; they were made by men of undoubted talent, but

not one of them capable of writing the poem, to save his soul. Tasso, who found that all his good-natured compliance only drew out a new flood of absurdities, was irritated beyond bearing. His friend Leonora, to soothe him, offered him a retreat in a palace of her own, but in his absence from Ferrara, his enemies—and such a man is sure to have them—were spreading calumnies, as he soon found, and went to the extent of opening his coffers and rifling his manuscripts. This stung him to the quick; he assailed one in sharp terms, words led to blows, and blows to a cowardly assault, which Tasso warded off triumphantly by his skill of fence, routing his enemies and drawing down on them Alfonso's vengeance.

But a deeper vexation came upon him at finding his poem, which he had kept back from publication and revised and re-revised to make perfect, was surreptitiously printing in various parts of Italy. Of course this shook all his hope, not only of legitimate profit, but of legitimate honor, if his own child was to be ousted by bastards. The duke, at his request, appealed to all Italian governments to have these spurious editions suppressed, and his brother-in-law, the Duke of Urbino, invited him to Modena and did everything possible to honor, flatter, and soothe him.

But his sensitive nature was fast giving way under these assaults. He began to imagine greater inju-

ries than he had received—that he had been accused of treason and of heresy; and under this delusion he ran at one of his enemies with a drawn sword in the chamber of the duchess. This invasion of all the proprieties led to his being put in ward, but apparently without unkindness. The duke scouted the charge of disloyalty, and the chief inquisitor that of heresy. But Tasso continued to appeal to his illustrious friends against his enemies, until, worn out by his importunities, they ordered him to stop writing to them. This course, which might have answered with some men, only added to Tasso's misery; he fancied the world was leagued against him, and he fled from Ferrara without money, and leaving his writings behind.

Much of his after life is a story of aimless wanderings. He first sought an asylum with his sister, who was well married at Naples, and who, though long parted from him, greeted him most cordially. Her care soon restored him, but as his health and spirits returned he began to think he was hasty in leaving Ferrara. He went back to Rome and, against every friend's advice, began soliciting permission to return. It was at last granted, but with the condition that Tasso should recognize his melancholy humor and be under the care of the court physician. He agreed to everything, and

returned. He was received with courtesy, but his manuscripts were not restored to him, and every application for an interview with the princesses for their recovery was repulsed. His patience gave way. He again left Ferrara, and wandered to city after city, almost everywhere welcomed not only with kindness, but with honor, even by sovereigns. He received many most flattering offers of a home, but the magnet of Ferrara was too strong, and he persisted in returning there on the eve of the duke's second marriage. He was not expected; he was not wanted; he was shut out from the duke and his sisters, mocked by the courtiers, and, as he believed, slighted by his friends. He broke out into the most violent curses against the ungrateful house to which he had sacrificed his peace and his brains. These came to Alfonso's ears, and he had Tasso put under strict guard, in a cellar room of a pauper madhouse.

Tasso was fairly stupefied at first by this outrageous treatment, but soon, being apparently allowed the free use of his pen, he poured out his sorrows to his friends and his prayers to the duke in odes that would have moved the heart of a hyena. But nothing could soften Alfonso's resentment, whatever its cause. In vain Tasso's release and liberty were begged for by the most illustrious supplicants, with the emperor at their head. Misfortune succeeded

misfortune. His great work was published piratically under protection of the Republic of Venice from mutilated copies. Leonora died without permitting that man to kiss her hand who had let his life be ruined for the mere chance of being in her presence. And for seven years his prison remained closed, though his quarters were gradually improved from the vile dungeon of his first confinement. Some gallant friends, disgusted at the piracy of his poem, obtained authentic manuscripts and published it correctly. It was again and again reprinted, and all Europe rang with his fame; but he derived no profit. His mind and body began to weaken, and, as too often happens, incarceration under a charge of madness went near to make him mad. At length Alfonso relented, a relenting as mysterious as his resentment, and Tasso went free. He passed the rest of his life in various cities, chiefly Naples, and recovered much of his health and spirits. He composed another crusading epic, "Jerusalem Conquered," which he preferred to the former; but posterity has not agreed with him. At Naples he found a cultivated and faithful friend in the poet Manso, who, forty years after, related to Milton the tale of his friend Tasso. He was repeatedly urged to visit Rome, but, like Virgil before him, clung to Naples as healthier. At length, in November, 1593, the Sacred College offered



him the laurel crown which none had borne since Petrarch. He accepted the offer, but the ceremony was postponed till April, 1595; and just before the day set he died, on the 25th, in the convent of St. Onofrio, where he is buried.

Such is a very, very imperfect sketch of the saddest life of mingled glory and sorrow that ever befell one of the world's most brilliant sons. Strength, beauty, genius, purity, honor came to this. Tasso's early romance is only known to biographers, and is hard to get; his tragedy, his second epic, and his poem on the seven days of creation have had hardly a larger fame. The "*Aminta*" I shall consider later. Many of his minor poems show abundant genius, and are instinct with that sensibility which ruled his life. But his solid fame rests on the "*Jerusalem Delivered*," which makes him, with Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto, complete the band of what his country fondly calls "the four Italian poets."

The "*Jerusalem Delivered*" is a true epic poem. It relates how the crusading princes, under Godfrey de Bouillon, took Jerusalem from the Turks in 1099. It is in twenty cantos and in eight-lined metre. The persons are Godfrey and the other Christian princes and knights, opposed to the vassal king of Jerusalem, the Sultan of Nicæa, Argantes the soldier of fortune, and Clorinda the Amazon. Both sides are reënforced

by supernatural and, indeed, superhuman allies. The Prince of Darkness, whom Tasso calls Pluto, sets in motion an army of demons who, operating, some directly with the elements and some through the sorcerer Ismeno, impede the Crusaders in many ways, particularly by throwing a spell over the forest whence the timber for siege purposes is to come; and a further ally is found in a Syrian princess called Armida, who, by irresistible powers of attraction, allures some of the bravest knights into an enchanted fortress. To counteract these foes, angelic aid is not lacking, the Heavenly Father himself sending Michael to repel the demons.

The principal Christian chiefs are historical; but Rinaldo of Este, the supposed ancestor of Tasso's benefactor, who put him in a madhouse to cure him of melancholy, is quite imaginary. He is the destined champion, who, when scarcely out of boyhood, surpasses all older men, but unfortunately kills a brother knight in a fit of passion, and goes into voluntary exile. Here he is found by Armida, who, designing to kill him, falls desperately in love and carries him off to a magic paradise in the Canaries, whence he is rescued to cut down the enchanted forest, force the siege to a triumphant end, and convert Armida to Christianity.

The first thought suggested by this poem is its com-

pleteness. It is worked out with a beginning, middle, and an end. All the episodes are strictly subservient to the main action. Even the flight of the love-sick Erminia to a shepherd's hut turns out in the end to have a deep influence at a critical moment. Every person has his part to play, every scene belongs to its right act. When one considers some of the most striking poems in literature, the "*Æneid*," the "*Orlando Innamorato*," the "*Squire's Tale*," the "*Faërie Queene*," "*Paradise Lost*," "*Faust*,"—some having no true ending, others a disappointing and others a languid one, it is a satisfaction to find in moderate compass a real whole, where nothing is superfluous and nothing is dull. For he must be hard indeed to please who cannot be deeply interested in the story, the incidents, the episodes, the descriptions, and the characters of Tasso's poem. There is no falling off, as too many find is the case with Virgil and Milton; there is none of the tediousness which makes it all but impossible to finish Berni and Spenser, and makes it far pleasanter to read Ariosto by bits than entire; the interest, never languid, rises as steadily to the last as in the divine Homer.

Especially is Tasso most attractive by his discrimination of character. I have tried to defend Ariosto from the charge of sameness in this matter; but his lively sketches are nothing to the living portraits of

Tasso, all standing out like those of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott, always true to themselves, not merely by always saying the same thing, but with a living personality which again recalls Homer. The Christian heroes, Godfrey, Tancred, Raymond, Eustace; the pagans, the Soldan, Argantes, Adrastus, Altamore; the ladies, Clorinda, Erminia, Armida, —they are discriminated with the most delicate touches, and though their occupations and places must needs lie within a narrow compass, each is himself and no other. Perhaps the invincible champion Rinaldo is the least real, although Tasso has robbed the historical Tancred of some of his best traits to adorn his hero. And nearly allied to the variety of characters is the variety of incident. One goes through the endless stories of the romancists as one does with Sir Thomas Malory, and finds the same battles and the same sorceries occurring and recurring and copied. Tasso copies; he draws freely on other writers, especially Virgil; but the variety and play of his incidents is very lively and agreeable.

Another quality that gives Tasso's work a peculiar charm is its delicacy and elevation of tone. I do not mean the loftiness that belongs to Dante and Milton: I mean that elevation which spurns everything foul and sordid, or even equivocal, as a stain on poetic beauty. I do not see how the warmest admirers of

Dante get over the repulsive matter so rife in the “*Inferno*” and too frequent in the “*Purgatorio*.” It is all very manly to call a spade a spade, but it need not give place to a dung-fork. Nor can it be overlooked that Ariosto, like his master Boccaccio, nay, like our own Chaucer, likes to talk about what had better be unsaid. But Tasso drew from Virgil, who drew it from Sophocles, an aversion, not in the least that of a prig or a prude, but simply of a good man, to what is unseemly in word or thought.

And with Tasso, as with his master, this purity arises from profound religious feeling. The Crusade is the enterprise of men who fought that the spot where the Lord Jesus lay should be no longer in the hands of those who disown him. Tasso writes as they fought—as the servant of God the Father Almighty, and his Church; and any one of any name who does not feel that impulse had better not read the “*Jerusalem Delivered*.” “*Paradise Regained*” and “*Pilgrim’s Progress*” are not more surely the work of a Christian, and none but a Christian, than this poem. This spirit is incarnate in his chief hero, Godfrey de Bouillon, and never had an epic a nobler hero. To the gallantry and forethought of Henry V, to the self-sacrifice of Hector and the wisdom and patience of Ulysses, he adds the character of a prince whose

only thoughts are for the people of God who have made him leader in a holy war.

There is no want of manliness in Tasso's poem; but there must seem to many readers a superfluity of what the Italian calls *tenerrezza*, almost amounting to *morbidezza*. Tasso, like so many of his countrymen, was deeply under the influence of Petrarch, and it is hard to find in him a trace of Dante. He not only gives a large part of his poem to episodes of love, but he is like his own hero Tancred in the catalogue of princes:

Then Tancred comes; none braver in the fight,  
Except Rinaldo, on that army's roll,  
Fairer in all his bearing to the sight,  
More lofty or intrepid in his soul.  
If any shade of fault can make less bright  
Such boast, 't is only love's insane control,  
Love in the midst of arms from brief sight born,  
Nursed by distress, and gathering force from scorn.

Not more surely does Milton's self-sustained and defiant loftiness stiffen the whole of "Paradise Lost," of "Samson Agonistes," and even of "Comus," than Tasso's passionate craving for affection softens, and to some readers weakens, his epic.

The verse of Tasso is eminently noble as well as melodious. In the latter quality it certainly is not superior to Petrarch, and possibly not to the best of Berni or Ariosto, but it has the grand epic march,

which would have been out of place with either of these poets. It has much of the dignity combined with beauty which belongs to Raphael's finest paintings, like the "Sermon at Athens" or the "Chastisement of Heliodorus." The poem is in the highest degree interesting, beautiful, touching, and noble.

I take part of the celebrated description of Olindo and Sophronia from Fairfax, the Elizabethan translator; whose performance, once undervalued, now seems to me overvalued. First, his love is described:

Sophronia she, Olindo, hight the youth,  
Both of one town, both in one faith were taught;  
She fair, he full of bashfulness and truth,  
Hoped little, longed for much, and asked for naught:  
He durst not speak, by suit to purchase ruth,  
She saw not, marked not, wist not what he sought:  
Thus loved, thus served he long, but not regarded,  
Unseen, unmarked, unpitied, unrewarded.

An image of the Virgin has been conveyed to a mosque, and thence stolen. Sophronia avows the theft, and is bound to the stake. Olindo comes forward and takes the blame: the king orders both to be burned.

About the pile of fagots, sticks, and hay  
The bellows raised the newly kindled flame,  
When thus Olindo, in a doleful lay,  
Begun too late his bootless plaints to frame:  
"Be these the bonds? Is this the hop'd-for day  
Should join me to this long-desired dame?  
Is this the fire alike should burn our hearts?  
Ah! hard reward for lover's kind desarts!

"Far other flames and bonds kind lovers prove,  
 But thus our fortune casts the hapless die;  
 Death hath exchanged again his shafts with love,  
 And Cupid thus lets borrowed arrows fly.  
 O Hymen, say, what fury doth thee move  
 To lend thy lamps to light a tragedy?  
 Yet this contents me, that I die for thee,  
 Thy flames, not mine, my death and torment be.

"Yet happy were my death, my ending blest,  
 My torments easy, full of sweet delight,  
 If this I could obtain, that, breast to breast,  
 Thy bosom might receive my yielded sprite;  
 And thine with it, in heaven's pure clothing drest,  
 Through clearest skies might take united flight."  
 Thus he complained, whom gently she reproved,  
 And sweetly spake him thus, that so her loved:

"Far other complaints, dear friend, tears and laments,  
 The time, the place, and our estate require;  
 Think on thy sins, whom man's old foe presents  
 Before that judge that quites each soul his hire;  
 For his name suffer, for no pain torments  
 Him, whose just prayers to his throne aspire;  
 Behold the heavens, thither thine eyesight bend,  
 Thy looks, sighs, tears, for intercessors send."

From Godfrey's reply to the envoys of the Egyptian caliph:

It was not then ambition's greedy sway  
 That spurred and guided us to take these arms:—  
 Far from our breast may God in heaven convey  
 So foul a plague, if in us lurk its harms!  
 Nor suffer that it taint us and decay  
 With poison sweet, that murders while it charms;  
 But his own hand, that stubborn hearts alone  
 Pierces and softens, and converts from stone.



This hath inspired us, this hath been our guide,  
Saved from all danger and from each distress;  
This hath the hills laid low, the rivers dried,  
Made summer's heat and frost of winter less;  
The raging ocean floods availed to chide,  
To bind and loose the tempest's haughtiness;  
This hath the lofty walls o'erthrown and burned,  
This hath the armed battalions slain and spurned.

Hence doth our daring, hence our hope arise,  
Not from our mortal valor, frail and weak;  
Not from our navy, nor from what supplies  
The Frankish might, or empire of the Greek;  
While this forsakes us never, never flies,  
We are not anxious for aught else to seek;  
Who knows how that defends, and how it saves,  
No other succor for his peril craves.

But if it shall deprive us of its aid,  
By our own sin, or from some cause unseen,  
What look we for but that our limbs be laid  
Where once the limbs of God have buried been?  
Die we may here, not grudging or afraid;  
Die we may here, not unavenged, I ween;  
No cause of mirth to Asia be our doom,  
Nor tears of ours attend us to the tomb.

### A picture of the infernal council:

Straightway the dwellers in the eternal gloom  
Call with hoarse sound the clarion of hell;  
The broad black caverns tremble at the boom,  
And the blind air reëchoes to the yell;  
Ne'er from the sky with such a crack of doom  
The bolt of thunder on the nations fell,  
Nor did the trembling earth e'er feel such shocks  
That in her teeming womb the vapor locks.

In varied bands from all the realms beneath  
Their gods are flocking to the lofty doors,  
Oh, from their forms uncouth what horrors breathe!  
What death, what terror from their eyeballs pours!  
Some human brows with snaky locks enwreath,  
And stamp with hoofs of beast the burning floors;  
While round their backs enormous tails are twined,  
That like a scourge now fold and now unwind.

Of these a part to left and part to right  
Go to their seats before their monarch dread;  
Central doth Pluto sit, and in his right  
Upholds his sceptre ponderous and red;  
No ocean cliff so tall, nor Alpine height,  
Not Calpe lifts itself, nor Atlas' head,  
But by his side would trifling hills appear,  
So his great brow and great horns doth he rear.

Dread majesty on his fierce mien impressed  
Augments the terrors of his mighty gaze;  
Red are his eyes and shot with venom'd pest,  
Gleaming as with a baleful comet's blaze.  
Covering his chin, and down his shaggy breast,  
Thick and unkempt his beard its length displays;  
And in the semblance of a yawning flood  
Opens his mouth defiled with sable blood.

#### Armida's fascinations:

Each art the lady plies whereby to win  
Some other slave of love within her snare,  
Nor keeps with all, or aye, the selfsame mien,  
But changes oft her movements and her air.  
Now self-contained her modest look is seen,  
Now seems again with eager glance to dare;  
Her scourge on those, her bridle lays on these,  
As each in passion slow or prompt she sees.

## The drought in the crusading camp:

In heaven extinguished is each kindly star,  
And cruel orbs exert on high their spell  
Whence influence rains that shapes and seals to mar  
The air with character malign and fell.  
Grows the injurious heat, and near and far  
More fatally its fires their force impel;  
To evil day succeeds more evil night,  
And worse behind it ever has in sight.

No more the sun doth rise, save flecked with stain  
Of bloody vapor round him and below,  
That on his forehead may be read too plain  
The sad foreboding of a day of woe;  
Nor ever sets but threat of equal pain,  
If he return the crimson patches show,  
And sharpen all the tortures felt before,  
With certain fear of tortures yet in store.

And while his rays are pouring from on high,  
Wherever mortal casts his gaze around,  
Yellow he sees the leaves, the flowers are dry,  
The thirsty herbage withers on the ground;  
The earth is cleft, the sinking waters fly,  
And everything by heavenly wrath is bound;  
The barren clouds that float along the air  
In guise of flames alone themselves declare.

The heaven as furnace black is seen to scorch,  
With naught that on the eye relief may shed;  
The western breeze is silent in his porch,  
And every motion of the air is dead.  
Only there blows, and seems a fiery torch,  
The wind that from the Moorish sands hath sped,  
Which burdensome to breast and throat alike  
Once and again with heavy blows doth strike.

Nor doth the night afford more grateful shade,  
But with the sun's dread heat she seems impressed;  
With darts of fire and comets' trail o'erlaid,  
And all in burning fringe her mantle dressed.  
Nor is the chary moon's due tribute paid,  
As feeble succor to the earth distressed  
Her dewy drops; and every herb and flower  
Demands in rain its own reviving shower.

From restless nights is exiled blessed sleep,  
And languid men their souls have vainly nursed  
With hope to lose themselves in slumber deep;  
But yet the crown of all their plagues is thirst:

. . . . .  
If ever any saw 'twixt verdant shores  
The liquid silver of a gentle lake  
Or living water's flood, that headlong pours  
From mount, or gentler course through meads doth take,  
He conjures up the vision, and restores,  
And for his very torment food doth make;  
For the cool tender image that he frames  
Parches and burns and sets his thoughts in flames.

Behold the members of the warrior stout,  
Whom never travel over longest way,  
Nor iron load that he ne'er moved without,  
Nor steel for slaughter levelled could dismay,  
Now by the heat all parched and melted out,  
Prostrate upon themselves a burden weigh,  
And in the veins there burns a hidden power  
That gnaws away and kills them hour by hour.

Spent is the steed, so fierce before; the blade  
That was his chosen food he loathes to see;  
Staggers his feeble foot; his neck that played  
Before so proud is hanging helplessly;  
No memory of the prowess he displayed  
Or prize or glory stirs his lethargy;  
The spoils, the trappings once in triumph borne  
Like some vile burden, all his hate and scorn.

Spent is the faithful dog, and all his care  
For his dear home and for his master sunk;  
Stretched out he lies, and for new breath of air  
Forever pants to cool his burning trunk;  
But though a breath of wind did nature spare  
Where from the heated heart relief had drunk,  
Or little rest or none therefrom it drew,  
So thick and foul the source from whence it blew.

The following is from Spenser's adaptation in the  
"Faërie Queene":

The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;  
"Ah! See, whoso fayre thing doest faine to see,  
In springing floure the image of thy day!  
Ah! See the virgin rose, how sweetly she  
Doth first peep forth with bashful modestie  
That fairer seems, the lesse ye see her may!  
Lo! See soon after how more bold and free  
Her bared bosom she doth broad display!  
Lo! See soone after how she fades and falls away!

"So passeth, in the passing of a day,  
Of mortal life the leafe, the bud, the floure;  
Nor more doth florish after first decay,  
That earst was sought to deck both bed and boure  
Of many a lady, and many a paramoure;  
Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,  
For soone comes age that will her pride defloure;  
Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,  
While loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime."

Tancred's combat with Argantes:

"Yield thee, brave man; acknowledge that by me  
Comes thy defcat, or if thou choose, by Fate;  
I ask no triumph and no spoil from thee,  
No reckoning for myself or price await";

Beyond his wont the pagan fierce to see  
Rouses and gathers all his rage and hate;  
Replies: "Thou of thy powers darest vaunt  
And darest Argantes as a coward taunt?"

"Avail thee of thy luck; I fear thee not,  
Nor let thy foolishness unpunished lie";  
So like a dying brand that makes more hot  
The flames that issue brighter as they die,  
His failing blood fills him with wrath, I wot,  
And calls back all his failing valiancy,  
And while he feels the hour of death decreed,  
Would fain adorn it with some glorious deed.

His left to its companion doth he lay,  
And with both joined brings down the heavy steel;  
The blow descends, and meeting on its way  
The foeman's sword, goes on, nor check doth feel,  
Lights on his shoulder, and its shearing way  
Full many wounds in shortest space reveal;  
If Tancred did not fear, his bosom bold  
Nature so made that fear it might not hold.

The horrid blow is doubled; but the wind  
Received its force, and wrath in vain was spent:  
Since Tancred to one side himself inclined,  
And sprang away, upon the stroke intent;  
Thou thine own blow, Argantes, now must find,  
Prone by its weight, and succor none be lent.  
Thou hast thyself o'erthrown, and this mayst claim  
That others from thy fall can win no fame.

The fall his half-closed wounds yet wider spread,  
And out the blood poured in a pool immense;  
His left on earth he plants, and riveted

Upright upon his knee, prepares defence:  
"Now yield thee," straight the courteous victor said,  
And new proposal made, with none offence;  
He hides his sword the while, with treacherous skill,  
Then strikes upon his heel, and threatens still.

Then Tancred felt his fury rise, and cried:—

“My mercy, villain, dost thou thus abuse?”

Then once and once again his falchion plied,

Where through the helm sure path there was to choose.

Thus died Argantes; as he lived, he died;

Dying he threatened, nor would weakness use,

Haughty and fierce and terrible in death,

His latest action, and his latest breath.

Tancred's recovery from his swoon:

I live? I still draw breath? and still behold

The hated rays of this disastrous day—

Day that my hidden follies doth unfold

And all my faults before me sternly lay?

O timid hand and slow, art thou so cold—

Thou who of striking knowest every way,

Thou minister of base and deadly strife—

To cut the thread that holds this guilty life?

Pierce but this bosom; bid thy cruel steel

Wage fierce destruction on my ready heart;

Yet impious blows and ruthless wont to deal,

Will pity seize thee thus to end my smart?

So shall I live in story to reveal

A wretched butt of love's unsparing dart—

A wretched butt whose worthless life alone

For cruelty unbounded can atone.

Among my tortures shall I live and care,

My righteous furies, wild and wandering,

For dark and solitary gloom to scare,

That my first error shall before me bring;

And the sun's look, that doth my sorrow bare,

Still shall I shun with coward shuddering;

While from myself my own unending fear

Still flees and finds myself forever near.

But where, alas! oh, where do they abide,

The relics of the body fair and chaste?

Whate'er unhurt escaped my fury's tide  
The furious beasts perchance already waste;  
O prey too noble, dear o'er all beside,  
Too sweet, too precious for the brutes to taste!  
Ah, wretched me, in whom the shades and woods  
First plant the sting and then the savage broods.

And with this epic closes the great line of Italian poetry which has sustained itself at so commanding a height for nearly three hundred years. For two centuries more, with a single exception to be named in its place, Italian poetry is luscious and nerveless, and, unless in the form of satire, has lost not merely the stern manliness of Dante, but the more delicate yet still firm fibre of Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso. I shall try to tell the story of its decadence so as to secure interest even for the failure.



## CHAPTER V

### PASTORAL POETRY—MARINO—TASSONI

BEFORE taking up the poets of the generation following Tasso, it is necessary to consider a peculiar style of poetry in which he led the way and surpassed all his competitors. I have said that in 1572 he composed, in two months, a poem called "Aminta" in the style denominated pastoral. It is understood that he had witnessed the performance of a poem of this kind by an obscure writer whom he felt at once he could excel, and the result of its public appearance at Ferrara ratified his belief. The "Aminta" met with boundless success, and when the poem was printed several years later, it found hosts of admirers, and has continued in high repute in Italy to this day.

The Italian pastoral play is, to my mind, the most singular form that literature ever assumed. The romances of Berni and Ariosto are a wild exaggeration of a state of society that really did exist, with all its characters and events heightened in outline and color. The pastoral attempts to retain a tone of real life, while taking away from actual society elements that

must belong to it. The men and women who people it are as impossible as the giants and fairies of romance. The fundamental idea is that somewhere in the world—the land generally selected is Arcadia, a mountainous country of the Peloponnesus—there lives a shepherd people whose chief occupation is tending flocks and herds, but who also carry on all the ordinary farming and household operations, varied by a good deal of hunting of the most ferocious wild beasts, bears and boars, who never seem to get exterminated. These people are always under the influence of the simplest and purest motives. There is no crime, no violence, no fraud, no lust. They are all perfectly content with their lot, never dreaming of emigrating, or bettering themselves, or rising above their pastoral situation. They always appear to have good weather for their crops, good pasture for their cattle, and plenty wherewith to feed and clothe themselves. Everybody appears to have Mr. Jesse Collings's three acres and a cow multiplied many times over. The gods are always worshipped, and no other government except the precepts of a few aged priests exists. Every man finds a mate in due time. There are occasional accesses of envy or jealousy, and once in a very great while, of treachery; but these are always exceptional, and scouted by the peasant people in general. These always speak the purest Roman Latin,

Tuscan Italian, or Parisian French. They always understand everything said to them, except when they deliberately choose to talk in riddles. They have frequent festivals, but never a fight. Nobody ever goes to the war, or pays taxes, or has his house burned, or finds living uphill work, or dies of anything but old age or a wound from a boar's tusk. There is never any snow requiring the cattle to be housed and the shepherds to keep within doors. A faithless husband, an ungrateful child, a peevish grandfather may be occasionally witnessed as a strange phenomenon, only to make clearer by exception the uniform virtue and sweetness of the mass.

Although the scene of these poems is laid wholly out of doors, there is never any characterization of scenery. The rivers, the mountains, the plains, and the forests are all exactly like each other. Nor do any of the personages ever have their features described, or their proportions, or their dress. True, once in a while a question is put as to the distinguishing traits of some unknown person, who is then indicated by the most commonplace marks, such as brown hair or blue eyes, which, in a homogeneous community, would suit hundreds. But the whole effect is completely colorless—a mere sketch in black and white.

Any one who knows what real farming and pastoral life is also knows that this Arcadian innocence

and serenity are as far removed from it as possible. There are undoubtedly many retired spots all over the world where the inhabitants live on from day to day engaged in country occupations, and ignorant of what goes on in the great world, and this ignorance exempts them from some of the faults that arise in great cities. But they have faults and vices of their own, which show that their nature is neither better nor worse morally than their neighbors'. And their prejudices, superstitions, sloth to learn, and dulness to perceive are quite alien to the calm rectitude, the serene acceptance of duty, however hard, and rejection of self, however charming, which your Arcadia of poetry possesses. Mr. Longfellow pictures such a community in a country whose name is often confounded with Arcadia. Parkman's History indicates that the dwellers by the Basin of Minas had a goodly admixture of the fox among their lamb-like qualities. The real ancient Arcadia took so little part in Greek history, her contributions to art, poetry, oratory, science, philosophy, government in all the brilliant ages of Hellas are so completely *nil*, that we can hardly say we know her people. But one thing is sure: that until Epaminondas came fifty leagues to show her how to make a country and a capital, the chief business of the Arcadians was furnishing mercenary troops for slaughter or plunder in the wars of other people, whether Greeks or barba-

rians. In the days of Ariosto, the best instance of a village people living far from cities and keeping flocks and herds on their own hillsides was the Swiss; and they, like the old Arcadians, let themselves out to fight other peoples' battles, and were noted for the tenacity with which they clutched at their wages.

We have left us two very striking pictures of country life among the Greeks: one, the "Works and Days" of Hesiod, at an indefinitely early period, and one, the "Idylls" of Theocritus, in the third century B.C. No one can read either—and both are lively reading—without losing at once any theory that the Greek rustic passed his time piping to gentle maidens in the midst of snowy sheep with blue ribbons on their necks. Hesiod was much given to grumbling, and the very unfavorable picture he gives of Bœotian life in the year 800 B.C. may be chiefly due to ill temper. But Theocritus of Syracuse is a most genial soul, and one cannot doubt that his picture of rural life in Sicily in the days of the Ptolemies is true to life. His shepherds stand out of the canvas in their occupations, amusements, passions, loves and hates, told in Doric speech as broad as Burns or Miss Murfree. But there is no sentimentalism. They are remarkably robust in mind as well as body, and if they enlist in King Ptolemy's army, there is no chance that any Syrian or Parthian will cheat them. Contemporary with

Theocritus are Bion and Moschus, in whose delicately plaintive songs there is much tender sentiment, but there is no false picture of country life. Much about the time Tasso died, Shakespeare drew shepherds in "As You Like It" and "A Winter's Tale," instinct with all the truth of Theocritus himself.

The Italians took their pastorals, and spoiled them in the taking, from Virgil's "Eclogues." These little poems, unsurpassed for charm of verse and gracefulness of thought, were the first productions of a very young poet, the son of a wealthy farmer, steeped in all the philosophy and literature that the schools of Italy could give him. No doubt his rustics have some touches from the life of his own home near Mantua. But these are mixed with scraps translated, sometimes mistranslated, from Theocritus, with prophecies of the golden age, and with a variety of purely literary visions belonging to no particular place or time, and so constitute no real picture of any actual society. From them, and from a few later Latin poets of less renown, Tasso and his contemporaries caught the idea of innocent retreats where all was sweet and holy. Just as the romance of chivalry rose by reaction from the dulness and hardness of mediæval life, so the pastoral vision rose by reaction from the disgust at court life—the intrigues, the waste, the alternations of wealth and poverty that great cities and courts ex-

hibited. It was what city people wished they might find, just as business men and fashionable ladies think it might be charming now to raise their butter and eggs on some abandoned farm; only to find that they are much better bought from an abandoned farmer. But in these days of scientific construction, one might sooner expect to see Astolfo riding through the air on a winged steed of brass than at any age to find Tasso's and Guarini's shepherds.

This absurdity—for such it is—does not prevent Tasso's "Aminta" from being very beautiful. Its chief beauty is its extreme simplicity in plot and style. The shepherd Amyntas has loved from boyhood the huntress Silvia, who turns a deaf ear to his suit. He has the sympathy and she the reproaches of all their mates. He rescues her from the bonds of a satyr, one of those singular wild men of the woods which the pastoral poets used to bring in as a superhuman element. Tasso's satyr is a very honest person, who cannot for the life of him see why Silvia refuses his advances. He declares this is rightly called the golden age, because gold buys everything. He determines to secure Silvia's affections by the simple process of tying her by her hair to a tree. From this position Amyntas rescues her, but she still repulses even the most delicate offices of love and flies; he thereupon tries to kill himself, but is prevented by their friends.

On a false report, however, that Silvia has lost her life in a wolf-chase, he throws himself from a cliff. This news is brought to Silvia, who is overcome with remorse, and hastens to seek and bury his body. But his fall has been broken by shrubs, and he is revived from stupor by her gestures of devotion, and all ends as one would wish.

It is difficult to tell this plot, if plot it may be called, without falling into a tone much like making sport of it. But no one who reads the "Aminta" will have that feeling. The form is dramatic, being a dialogue among various persons; but none of the incidents, what may be called the pictorial part, appear on the stage—the attack of the satyr, the rescue, the chase of the wolf, the leap of Amyntas, are all reported by some speaker. The piece, therefore, would depend for its effect on the perfection of recitation, aided, probably, by music. The same nice discrimination of character that is seen in the "Jerusalem Delivered" runs through the "Aminta." The shepherds and shepherdesses have not very much to say—there is nothing very profound about their talk; but they say it clearly, elegantly, and purely. It is the outflow of the simplest emotions which exist in all men when not stifled by conventions and traditions, which are just as bad in the woods as in the cities; the emotions of heart speaking to heart with sincerity, whether of



love or hate, hope or fear. It should be noticed that Tasso says nothing about Arcadia, or attempts to give any local coloring, true or false. The scene is in the country, but it is near a city. There is not the least attempt to give details of dress, or weapons, or scenery; the play of human feelings brought out by human accidents constitutes the whole.

The verse is chiefly the ordinary dramatic ten-syllable blank verse, while in the more passionate parts the lines are mostly short, with a very sparing use of rhyme. At the end of each act the chorus sings a rhymed ode. The whole poem is simply the pouring out of a sweet and limpid strain of poetry from the heart of a man of cultivated mind, of lively fancy, and of sensitive temper. It has not the fanciful art of Tasso's epic, nor the fire of his love-songs. It is the easiest thing in the world to criticise—and those who criticise it had better try to write it. I make two extracts,—one of the choruses, and one description which has given birth to a beautiful piece of sculpture of our own day, by Tito Angelini, formerly owned by a citizen of Boston:

I found her

There near the city, in those meadows broad  
Where among waters doth an islet lie;  
Above a clear and tranquil pool was she  
Holding herself suspended, that she seemed  
Regarding her own self, and all the while

Asking the water's counsel in what way  
 She should arrange upon her brow the hair,  
 And o'er the hair a veil, and o'er the veil  
 The flowers her bosom held. From time to time  
 She lifted now a privet, now a rose,  
 And laid them on her lovely snow-white neck,  
 Or on her vermeil cheeks, and with the flower  
 Compared herself; and then, as if rejoiced  
 At victory, she lighted up a smile  
 That seemed as if it said, "I conquer you;  
 I do not wear you as my ornament,  
 But wear you only to expose your shame."

---

O love, within what school  
 Or by what master's rule  
 Is learnt thy long and doubtful art—to love?  
 Which teaches to reveal  
 Whate'er our mind may feel  
 While on the wing it soars to heaven above?  
 Not Athens' learned men  
 In their Lyceum told,  
 Nor Phœbus from his mount;  
 For he that would recount  
 How love we may acquire,  
 His words are few and cold,  
 They have no voice of fire  
 Such as to thee belongs;  
 They cannot raise their ken  
 To probe thy mysteries:  
 Thou, love the teacher, art  
 The worthiest and the best,  
 And thou art by thyself alone expressed.  
 Thou easily dost teach  
 The rudest minds to reach  
 Those matters marvellous  
 Which thine own hand for us  
 With passion's letters writes in others' eyes.  
 To sweet and moving tones

The tongue thou loosest of thy faithful few;  
And oft, O strange and new,  
The eloquence of love! —  
    Oft in a strain confused,  
With broken words and sighs,  
    The heart doth open best,  
And oft appears to move  
    Better than if in learned phrases dressed;  
And silence oft doth share  
    The power of speech and prayer.  
O love, let others turn  
    What Socrates hath writ,  
For I in two bright eyes the art will learn;  
    Wasted be all the time  
When pens the learned band  
    Besides my rustie rhyme  
On the rude bark inscribed by ruder hand.

The success of Tasso's "Aminta" called out a host of rivals, of whom the most prominent was Giovanni Battista Guarini. Guarini was another of the brilliant men who were drawn to the court of Ferrara by the magnificence of the house of Este, only to experience the truth of Shakespeare's words, taken from a greater than Shakespeare:

O how wretched  
Is that poor man who hangs on princes' favors!

Guarini was born at Ferrara in 1537, being seven years older than Tasso. His father was professor of literature at the University of Padua, and carefully educated his son, so that, at the age of twenty, he was chosen to succeed to his father's chair. But some of

his lyrics caused the Duke of Ferrara to invite him to his court, where he formed the strictest friendship with Tasso. The duke knighted him, and sent him on several embassies to all parts of Europe, which brought the envoy no profit, for the duke, like the Congress of the United States of America, saw no reason why his ambassadors should not be out of pocket for the honor of representing him. Guarini accordingly, after forty years' service, renounced Ferrara and passed into the employ of other princes, receiving the same royal reward; his last station being at Florence, where the head of the Medici showed him more substantial marks of honor. But he chose also to inflict on Guarini the irretrievable outrage of forcing the poet's son into a marriage with one of his discarded favorites. Guarini withdrew in just indignation and, after some delay, reëntered the service of the Duke of Ferrara, who sent him on an embassy to the pope. Besides the ingratitude of his great patrons, he had the misfortune to lose his beloved wife, and in a more distressing way his daughter, while his sons afflicted him by quarrelling over the relics of a property which their father had sacrificed in his public employments. He ultimately went to live in Venice, and died there in 1612.

His works are of various kinds, but the one which has given him his renown is the "Pastor Fido," or "Faith-

ful Shepherd.” This pastoral has been strangely thought to have been the model of Tasso’s “Aminta,” but the dates show that Tasso’s poem was performed eleven years before Guarini’s appeared, which was at the marriage of the Duke of Savoy with the daughter of Philip II of Spain, at Turin, in 1585. The “Pastor Fido” rivalled the “Aminta” in popularity, and their comparative merits have often been discussed. On the score of elaboration there cannot be any question. Guarini has invented a complicated plot, much in the style of the Greek tragedies, while Tasso, one might say, has no plot at all. But the plot of the “Pastor Fido” has several hackneyed and some repulsive incidents, including the ancient tales of an infant coming under the care of those who are not its parents, and of an oracle demanding an annual human sacrifice. Another incident in the plot is a stratagem to alienate two devoted lovers by false suspicions, in the hope of securing one of them for the plotter. This character, Corisca, has been from the first condemned as one of the least agreeable on any stage—a shameless, treacherous woman, who is ready to sacrifice the life of another woman and the peace of mind of a man to win the latter by force to herself. The amiable characters in the poem are attractive, and drawn with bolder and finer strokes than those in the “Aminta”; but the huntsman, Silvio, who boasts that he has

defied the power of love, is only Tasso's Silvia with the sex reversed. The dialogue has more snap and sparkle to it, and is loaded with proverbs and sayings; but all this play of wit and imagery carries it further and further away from the simplicity which Tasso so wisely adopted for his idyl. I can conceive that any one, on the first reading of the two pastorals, might think the "Pastor Fido" equal, or even superior, to the "Aminta"; but that a second reading should deepen that impression is inconceivable. I can understand its having a greater success on the stage, for the characters and situations would lend themselves better to the ordinary artifices of theatrical display; but it is hardly possible to prefer it as a poem. I take two extracts from it, similar to those I took from the "Aminta,"—one of the choruses and the speech of the shepherd who thinks he has discovered proof that the woman to whom he has kept faith is faithless:

Myrtillo, why delay?  
She who once gave thee life  
From thee has ta'en it, and to others given;  
And thou dost live, thou wretch, thou dost not die!  
O die, Myrtillo, die  
To torment and to grief,  
Since to thy bliss, thy pleasure, thou art dead.  
Die, dead Myrtillo, die;  
Thou ended hast thy life;  
Then let thy torture end;  
Depart, poor lover, now  
Out of this hard and agonizing death  
Which holds thee for thy greater woe in life.

But what? Ought I to perish unavenged?  
First will I make her die who gave me death;

So long my wish to die

Within me be restrained

Until in righteousness I take the life  
Of her who took unrighteously my heart.

Ah, truly was that maiden's error great

Of all our woes the cause;

Who, breaking faith to thy most sacred laws,

O love, gave sad offence,

Whereby the deadly ire

Of the undying gods was set on fire

Which all the sad expense

Of blood from guiltless hearts can never sate.

So much is faith, of every virtue root,

Of every noble heart sole ornament,

In honor held above;

Thus to make lovers here, from whence may shoot

Our nature's bliss, is bent

The eternal fire of love.

Ye blinded mortals, ye in whom such thirst

Of ownership doth burn,

Guarding some treasured urn

Where sleeps a corse of gold, a naked shade

Which ever wanders round where it was laid,

How can desire be fed

For beauties dead, or in your hearts be nursed?

The wealth your stores conceal

Are loves that cannot feel; living and true

Is love 'twixt soul and soul; all things beside

Since love they are denied,

Can never claim affection as their due,

The spirit, since alone it loves again,

Alone is worthy love and lover to attain.

The pastoral poem, or drama, remained in favor in Italy for some time longer, but I am not aware of its drawing a single vigorous genius to write in that

strain. It passed to France and to England, and Thyrsis, Strephon, Chloe, and Daphne continued to haunt the literary shades for a century and a half. Some of Spenser's poetry was written in this tune, but the most successful pastoral production is John Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess." No piece of the time contains a greater flow of exquisite melody, and there is all Fletcher's dramatic spirit; but the play is disfigured by several offensive lines, and the female villain is as repulsive as her prototype, Guarini's Corisca. It was best that the pastoral drama should be done once for all so well that no one should dare to do it again—and it was done. It was handled by one who had a tenderer sense of melody than Fletcher, and a richer imagination than Ariosto; whose ornaments sink Guarini's to the stage jewels that they are, and might make Petrarch wish his gems had a finer setting; one who in delicacy was equal to Tasso, and in austere grandeur to Dante; who could rise to philosophy loftier than Lucretius, and thrill the heart with harmony like Virgil; whose compliments Shakespeare might raise his head from golden slumber to hear, and whom Homer would claim for the long line of his offspring; who had climbed a holier mount than Parnassus, and drunk of a more sacred spring than Castaly; who had soared to heaven on the wheels of Ezekiel and felt his lips touched by the coal of Isaiah;



and of whom the amazing glory is that his pastoral—his “Comus”—is not the finest work of John Milton.

The plain fact is that Italian poetry had begun, in the time of Guarini, a process of degeneration which soon became decay. Independence of thought and feeling was practically lost in Italy. The various sovereigns of the different provinces, native or foreign, while giving patronage to poets who flattered them, had no place in their courts for men with the freedom of Berni or the elevation of Tasso. The literature was overwhelmed by its own past greatness. In whatever line a poet chose to write, the verse of some illustrious bard, Latin or Italian, rose like a statue in his way to offer him models he could not attempt to surpass, and which he was only too ready to imitate. The Academy *della Crusca*—that is to say, of the Sieve—which had set itself the task of bolting the flour of literature, and parting the pure grain from the bran, had woven its sieves finer and finer, till even Tasso was too coarse for them, and the result was to be expected—the wheat of the Italian poets lost all its nourishing power, and was as unfit for food as if it had been pure chaff or a breakfast cereal. The extreme sinner developed by this process was one whose name appears on his title-pages as Marino, but he is generally called Marini.

Giovanni Baptista Marino was born in Naples in

1569. In him was repeated the old tale of a son who persisted in writing verse, while his father was bound he should be a lawyer. But the latter, unlike Bernardo Tasso, banished his prodigal from his presence; but he found a protector in the Duke de Bovino, who obtained him official employment. He became compromised, however, in a love intrigue, and retreated to Rome. Here his talents soon attracted the favor of Cardinal Aldrovandi, who, besides other favors and employments, took him on an embassy to Turin. He lived here for some time, high in favor with the Duke of Savoy, who conferred knighthood on him. But he came into collision with Martola, the duke's secretary, a rival poet. They satirized each other in verse, and Martola, driven to fury, fired at Marino while walking with one of the duke's intimates, whom the shot wounded seriously. Martola was punished at the time, but he succeeded by new intrigues in throwing Marino into disfavor, so that he left Turin and went to Paris. Here he set himself to court the queen mother, Marie de' Médicis, who gave him a handsome pension, which he requited by dedicating his poem to her son, the youthful King Lewis XIII. He left Paris after ten years' stay, in 1622, and passed the rest of his life in Rome and Naples, in high favor with the great and learned, dying in 1625.

His poem called "*Adone*," on the loves of Venus

and Adonis, is in twenty cantos. It became, on publication in 1622, a prodigious favorite and a perfect text-book for certain writers called the *Seicentisti*, or "men of the sixteen hundreds." This reputation it sustained for over a century, and continued to be reprinted at least as late as 1789. Yet in another thirty years it had gone out of favor; and it speaks wonders for the restoration of correct taste in Italy that later generations should have rejected what the earlier admired and imitated.

The "Adone" is a deliberate attempt to make a living poem exclusively out of mythological people, Venus and Cupid and Vulcan and Juno and Adonis. Venus has whipped Cupid with the bough of a rose-bush for disturbing the domestic bliss of Olympus. He is advised in return to make his mother the victim of his arrows. He contrives that the beautiful youth, Adonis, shall be carried in a boat to Venus's own island of Cyprus, and that she shall there fall hopelessly in love with him, a passion which he returns, thereby wholly differing from the Adonis of Shakespeare written twenty years before. The after narrative of their love and its fate is padded out to the length I named by telling over again, with copious detail, a great number of the legends contained in every ancient poet in the twelve centuries from Homer to Claudian, to say nothing of imitators and dictionary-

writers in the day when every spark of original Greek and Roman genius was dead. The poem is, in fact, a mythological dictionary in verse. It is very good verse; there is infinite ingenuity in the cadences and rhymes, and it runs on without an effort. The imagination is pretty lively; Marino will take an idea and work it out in a score of fanciful details, with any number of conceits and antitheses, such as abound in Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," and in his other early works, like "Love's Labor's Lost" and the "Rape of Lucrece"; and equally with his contemporaries, Chapman and Donne and Herbert. But there is this essential difference, that the conceits of Shakespeare and Chapman were those of a comparatively crude literature, those of Marino of an over-ripe one. Petrarch had as many quaint analogies two centuries and a half before; Pulci as many fantastic details at about half the same interval. But Petrarch's fancies were connected with a living Laura and a living Colonna, whose names he might use for puns, but whose hearts were beating like his own. Pulci talked about men and women who, it was supposed, once had lived on earth, and whom he tried to picture as real men and women, even with grotesque outlines and flaming colors. But if the Greeks ever supposed Venus and Adonis to have existence, it was not such as they bear in Marino, whose gods and goddesses re-

mind me of what was once said to a private tutor at Harvard College. He was preparing a youth for admission, and reading to him a goodly portion of Ovid's "Metamorphoses." The youth listened in gentle bewilderment to the tales of Jupiter and Phæton and Apollo and Daphne for some five hundred lines, and then remarked: "But these gods and goddesses died a long time ago, did not they"? Marino's gods had died a thousand years before he was born, and all the life they ever had, however much it might glow and beat in Homer and Pindar, in Ovid and Statius, was utterly beyond his power to revive in *ottava rima* in the generation that saw the Pilgrims land at Plymouth. I take a bit from Cupid's visit to Vulcan's workshop, where he gets his father to forge him a specially fatal dart:

When to the dart the matchless workman's craft  
Had perfect polish, fullest lustre given,  
The child applied to it a slender shaft,  
But one whereby the hardest breast is riven;  
He feather'd with two little wings the haft,  
And stained the tip with sweetest venom's leaven,  
And then the cavern and its workmen eyed,  
All swelling with his impudence and pride.

The child audacious and of daring full  
Of the fair Goddess from the billows sprung,  
Went spying round, and every steel-wrought tool  
His wanton sport in wild disorder flung;  
Now at the huge uncouth Cyclopien school,  
Their shapeless eye with shaggy brow o'erhung,

Now at his father's heel and awkward limp  
He cast his scoff, and laughed, malicious imp!

He saw the scorched and swarthy monsters smite  
With mauls responsive pounding steel on steel;  
"Aha!" said he, "too weak your nerves, too light  
The fitting balance<sup>a</sup> of such strokes to feel;  
My hand can teach and show with greater might  
And greater fury when the blows you deal;  
All from my hand may learn, which rends apart  
The roughness of an adamant heart."

Then turned to him who had his weapon made;  
These words he spoke: "Within that forge of thine  
Colder than ice itself is flame displayed.  
A torch of far more melting heat is mine."  
Then in his hand the thunderbolt he swayed  
And let his insolence unbridled shine  
That while his fingers made its terrors move  
He gathered force to launch his jests at Jove.

At the very time Marino was gurgling on in this strain, a poet of a very different character was doing his utmost to redeem the honor of the Italian muse by a very different note. It is a striking fact in the literary history of many countries that the decay of literature has been averted for a time, or positively arrested while fresh seed is germinating, by some form of satirical writing. The decadence of Greek literature was for a time deferred by Lucian. When the bombast of Roman taste had all but stifled the genius of Lucan and Statius, and its verse was dribbling out in the inanities of Silius Italicus, Juvenal

blew a note on his old trumpet that might have raised Cato from the dead. The degrading corruption which assailed English verse towards the end of Milton's life was half redeemed by the satire of Butler and Dryden. When English poetry had fallen to about its lowest depth, a breath of free originality was given it by Churchill. But in the days of Marino the old Italian satire of Berni was recast according to an idea wholly fresh in modern poetry, the mock-heroic or comic epic, a memory of the "Battle of the Frogs and Mice," a delicious travesty of Homer that Homer himself would have loved. The author of this original design was Alessandro Tassoni, in his "Secchia Rapita," or "Rape of the Bucket." He was a native of Modena in the year 1565, who, though of a noble family, had to struggle in his childhood with orphanage and lawsuits; yet he persevered in study at Ferrara and Bologna. Going to Rome to seek his fortune, his amiable manners soon attracted the notice of the Cardinal Colonna of the time, who took him, as his secretary, to Spain. Thence he was despatched on an important errand to Pope Clement VIII, who, in answering the cardinal's despatch, took occasion to speak in high terms of his secretary. This led Tassoni to take the tonsure, which involved, at the time, few clerical duties; but he derived no profit from this movement. Cardinal Colonna, however, kept him in

his service on comfortable terms for many years. At about the age of fifty, the Duke of Savoy, the patron of Marino, made him secretary of his embassy in Rome, and attached him to the household of his son, with a handsome salary, which he never paid. After some unhappy experiences in the service of this and other great men, such as his brother poets had experienced before him, he gave up the profitless calling, bought a small estate near Rome, and settled down to a country life. From this he was drawn, first by Cardinal Ludovisi, and afterwards by his native prince, the Duke of Modena, who gave him an honorable employment, a well-paid salary, and a home in the palace, where he lived with great pleasure for three years, but his health suddenly failing, he died in 1635. He was a man of robust build, a free talker disposed to be caustic, a profound student of philosophy and history, and deeply read in his own tongue. He published several valuable works in prose and verse; but the "Rape of the Bucket" is that which gives him rank among Italy's original geniuses.

This is founded on two incidents in the civil wars of Italy in the thirteenth century. The neighbor cities of Modena and Bologna were constantly engaged in squabbles, and in one of these a party of Modenese had penetrated within the walls of Bologna and, stopping to drink at a well, had been suddenly encoun-



tered and forced to depart, carrying off, however, the bucket in triumph. This historical capture weighed on the inhabitants of Bologna, and they tried to recover their bucket, which the Modenese would never give up in peace or war; and what claims to be the identical bucket is still shown in Modena. With this incident Tassoni combines that of the capture of Henry, the son of the Emperor Frederic II, (whose German pet name *Heinz* the Italians turned into *Enzio*) by the Bolognese, who were of the Guelf or church party, while Modena was of the imperial or Ghibelline faction.

Tassoni tells us, in twelve short cantos, how the two cities quarrelled: how the Modenese captured the bucket; how the Bolognese sent a solemn embassy to reclaim it, offering some compensation, but demanding its formal replacement; how the Modenese utterly refused and went to war; how the Emperor Frederic sent a body of troops under his son to the aid of Modena, and fourteen cities of Romagna joined Bologna; the battle,—the ups and downs of fortune,—the part taken by Mars, Venus, Mercury, and Apollo on either side, the truce, relieved by a tournament, the various attempts of the pope to mediate, at last with success. And these incidents are told in the most heroic strain. The usual pomposity of the epic, which even Virgil and Tasso do not always shake off, and in

which Lucan and Statius revel, is caricatured in the neatest manner. Whole stanzas might seem not out of place in the "Orlando" or the "Gerusalemme," and suddenly we are made to laugh by a hit at some queerness of manners or dialect in the two cities or their allies, some personal weakness of the combatants, some playful introduction of Tassoni's own contemporaries. We never lose sight of the fact that it is all a tempest in a tea-pot which has arrayed the free cities of Romagna and the tyrant of Lombardy, the pope and the emperor, as allies of two moderate-sized towns. The Bolognese love of rich eating, familiar to all by its immemorial sausages, is kept well but not tediously forward. The poem undoubtedly gave the first suggestion to Boileau of his "Lutrin," and to Pope of his "Rape of the Lock." It is very witty and very readable. It has two defects apt to occur in such works. First, a mock-heroic poem whose date is set two hundred and fifty years before the author's time is sure to be packed full of jests of his own day. This I spoke of as true in Pulci and Berni. After all, Tassoni could have little real knowledge of the absurdities of pope and prince, Bologna and Modena, in the year 1240; he must supply his fun from what he saw himself in 1620. Pope laid his scene at Hampton Court in Queen Anne's reign, and brought his mystical sylphs to light up his own time, instead of the reverse; and he is easier to follow than Tassoni.

The second fault in Tassoni is occasional coarseness, sometimes repulsive, though hardly so outrageous as "Hudibras." It is the direct result of making the heroic contemptible; the impulse to put great people in a really compromising situation, no matter by what means, falls in too easily with the general tone of the work. But the staple of Tassoni's poem is as clean as it is witty—he has the fundamental common sense of his country, with a self-control in driving things too hard or too far that is rare.

I come to offer you a thing unheard  
Which will perchance cause you your brows to arch:  
There lies an ancient land by heaven preferred  
To share its favors when all others parch;  
Distant but thirteen miles as flies the bird;  
With your own territory doth it march;  
There Pansa died of yore, and from the smart  
His followers felt they named it Riven-Heart.  
Still after all these years have spent their tale  
Its early name doth it preserve and keep.  
Once there were pools, and many a marshy vale;  
Now meadows ploughed and pasture sweet for sheep;  
Nor yet can all the farmers' toil prevail  
To chain the native veins of moisture deep;  
But there are depths of water yet undried  
Wherein the songster fishes still abide.  
The sirens of the ditches, who allure  
From slumber, decked with many a colored stripe,  
Within the meadow and the wave secure  
Make endless summer with their tuneful pipe;  
Blest like Aurora's realm with pleasure pure  
It seems, where grow the race to manhood ripe  
Who in their manners and their semblance bold  
Present the likeness of the age of gold.

Now all this land, so full of wealthy store,  
My country bids me offer you outright  
If that same bucket which from one you tore  
Of ours, with malice (which may God requite),  
When yours two days ago such mischief bore,  
Forcing the gate which yielded to your might,  
Shall publicly be placed by you again  
Within the well from which by you 't was ta'en.

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O Muse, thou who hast sung the noble deeds  
Of Kings of Rats and Frogs in ages gone,  
So that with them still ring the flowery meads  
Along the sunny slopes of Helicon,  
Tell me the names, the forces, and the meeds  
Of all the haughty nations that came on  
And with their arms injurious did combine  
To wreck the city of the sausage fine.

When once the preparations and the arms  
Of great Bologna by report were spread,  
Of such a high emprise the glittering charms  
Fourteen fair cities to the contest led;  
The Church was cheered, the Empire all alarms;  
Cold chill felt Italy throughout her spread;  
And sure the Soldau of the Mamelukes  
Sent information to the king of Cooks.

The Pope, who was the father and defence  
Of holy Church and Guelfic partisans,  
Had heard the rumor of this strife intense,  
For rumors of it even spread to France;  
So to supply his own with faith and sense,  
He bade his Nuncio to the strife advance:  
A household prelate who from Venice came,  
And Monsignor Querenghi was his name.

This was in various tongues a man of learning,  
In Tuscan and in Latin too a poet,

Great speaker and philosopher discerning,  
No word of Augustin but he would know it;  
But yet no cardinal, the Pope not yearning  
To raise a Ghibelline, who dared not show it;  
And so, when finished was his expedition,  
He lost his trouble and gained no position.

## CHAPTER VI

FILICAJA—GOLDONI—METASTASIO—CASTI

TOWARDS the close of the seventeenth century, Italian poetry was sinking in a slough of false taste as dull and foul as the pool of Styx that surrounded Dante's fiery city. At the time when Milton had just died and Corneille was still living, when Racine was in his prime and Dryden shaking himself free from his early faults, the Italian poetry afforded nothing but exaggerated and stilted rhetoric cast into sickly-sweet verse, without one manly thought, one free burst, one bold cadence, one playful sally. Yet at this very time

“the hours

Were silently engendering of the day”

when a lyric song should break out from the very cloisters and academies, as daring as Pindar, as gorgeous as Gray, as patriotic as Campbell. The bard, all ready to soar into the upper day as soon as the call came, was Vincenzo Filicaja.

Filicaja was born in Florence the 30th of December, 1642—just five days after Isaac Newton. His

family was of senatorial rank, and though he lost his mother in infancy, his father watched his education with devoted care. He studied law at the University of Pisa, but pushed his studies also into philosophy and theology, and he made personal and practical religion, one might say, the chief business of his life, retiring altogether from the favorite pursuits of the men of his own age, which, to say the truth, were almost wholly frivolous or worse, and allowing himself hardly any relaxation from the severity of his life but music. His early poetry took the form of love-songs to a young lady who had attracted him, but on her death he destroyed them all, and prayed for pardon for the waste of his talents. He married young and became the father of two sons; he also became early a member of the Academy *della Crusca*, and yielded somewhat to the nonsense of such institutions, where the members assumed Greek names, as if Polybius Æmonius indicated any more literary culture than Vincenzo Filicaja. It is not easy to convey to those who have not gone rather deep into Greek history the supreme absurdity of such a title; but let us try to suppose that when Mr. Longfellow joined the American Academy he had assumed the name of the Scandinavian Froisart! But Filicaja also joined one of the religious fraternities or companies so characteristic of noble life in Florence, and made a pilgrimage to the shrine

of Loretto in undoubting faith. He gradually felt more and more distaste for social life, and withdrew to an estate in the country, giving himself to his family, his books, and his devotions. From this seclusion he was startled by events which aroused all Europe.

The Emperor Leopold was engaged in one of those constant struggles with Hungary which have been such a thorn in the side of Austria. The Hungarians had at one time been aided by the Turks, with whom Leopold effected a truce. But that had come to an end, and the Grand Vizier suddenly flung two hundred thousand men directly on Vienna. The emperor was in despair; he had been saved in his former war by the troops of Lewis XIV, with whom he was now on the verge of hostilities. He sent a most tearful appeal to John Sobieski, king of Poland. That great captain brought up his forces, and, seconded by the Duke of Lorraine, attacked the camp of the Turks and sent them flying in hopeless rout, thereby saving the empire and all Christendom. All central and western Europe was grateful; but Filicaja, the most devout of men, who looked upon the war with the Turks as a new crusade, not for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, but for the existence of truth and the Church, broke forth into six odes such as Petrarch had never sung, and entirely beyond the genius, I will not say of his contemporary Dryden, but of any



modern genius save Milton. The first is a passionate prayer to heaven before the siege was raised; the second is the outburst of the poet's own feelings; the sixth is a thanksgiving corresponding to the prayer; two are addressed to the victorious generals; and one is dedicated to his sacred Cæsarean majesty, who had about as much to do with his own deliverance at Vienna as had Filicaja in Florence. The poet himself circulated these odes in private only; but his friends printed them, and they flew all over Europe, admired by every one who could appreciate them, and especially by the greatest statesman and lawyer, and one of the most accomplished men of his time, John Somers, afterwards Chancellor of England. The King of Poland sent to the poet a suitable response, and so did another crowned head, less respectable even than Leopold—Christina, the ex-queen of Sweden, who, having left the Lutheran Church and established herself at Rome, was the object of an adulation from the adherents of the pope which she little deserved. To Filicaja, however, she was a generous friend. She assured the fortunes of his elder son, a youth of great promise, who on her death entered the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, but died at an early age, to his father's inexpressible grief. The duke most wisely and kindly adopted the best form of consolation, by making Filicaja a senator, and engaging him in the

most honorable and active service, as governor, first of Volterra and then of Pisa, in both of which posts his pleasing manners, kindly disposition, and deep sense of duty made his administration most acceptable to the citizens and to his master. He continued to write poetry; but it was all in a deeply religious, almost mystical strain, and he died on the 24th of September, 1707.

The victory odes of Filicaja are in the highest tone of lyric poetry. The only serious criticism that can be made on them is that they are overloaded with classical allusions, sometimes obscure. Thus, the Turks are Thracians; Constantinople is Byzantium; and thus the air is heavy with the perfume, or rather the reek, of later Rome. Italian poets, as far back as Dante, were not content with drawing largely on Virgil, Horace, or even Ovid for phrase, images, and scenes, but were great students of Statius, whom readers of Dante will remember he praises to adulation in the "Purgatorio," partly from being misled by a tradition that Statius was in secret a Christian. Marino and Filicaja both show the influence of Statius, who was undoubtedly a man of great poetic genius and copious learning, but painfully tainted with the bombastic obscurity of the reign of Domitian, of which worthless tyrant his necessities had made him an abject courtier.

One of Filicaja's sonnets has always been recognized

as of supreme beauty, expressing, with a directness, force, and pathos which no translation can possibly render, the never-comforted sorrows of Italian patriots at the subjection of their lovely land to foreign conquerors.

Italy, Italy, thou who hast from fate  
The luckless gift of beauty, whence distress  
Comes as thy fatal dower, in wretchedness  
Upon thy brow to bear in branded weight,  
O were thy beauty less, or force more great  
That he might dread thee more, or love thee less,  
Who in the splendor of thy loveliness  
Seems dying, yet defies with deadly hate;  
Then from the Alps I should not see descend  
The armed torrents, nor the Gallie horde  
Drink from the Po its blood defiled wave;  
Nor see thyself, girt with another's sword,  
The stranger's arm against thyself defend,  
Victor or vanquished, still to be a slave.

Macaulay's "The Deliverance of Vienna" is thus translated from Filicaja :

The chords, the sacred chords of gold,  
Strike, O Muse, in measure bold;  
And frame a sparkling wreath of joyous songs  
For that great God to whom revenge belongs.  
Who shall resist his might,  
Who marshals for the fight  
Earthquake and thunder, hurricane and flame?  
He smote the haughty race  
Of unbelieving Thrace,  
And turned their rage to fear, their pride to shame.  
He looked in wrath from high  
Upon their vast array;

And in the twinkling of an eye  
Tambour, and trump, and battle-cry,  
And steeds, and turbaned infantry,  
Passed like a dream away.

Such power defends the mansions of the just;

But, like a city without walls,  
The grandeur of the mortal falls

Who glories in his strength, and makes not God his trust.

As the curling smoke-wreaths fly  
When fresh breezes clear the sky,  
Passed away each swelling boast  
Of the misbelieving host.  
From the Hebrus rolling far  
Came the murky cloud of war,  
And in shower and tempest dread  
Burst on Austria's fenceless head.

But not for vaunt or threat  
Didst Thou, O Lord, forget

The flock so dearly bought, and loved so well.

Even in the very hour  
Of guilty pride and power

Full on the circumcised Thy vengeance fell.

Then the fields were heaped with dead,

Then the streams with gore were red,

And every bird of prey, and every beast,

From wood and cavern thronged to Thy great feast.

Beneath Thy withering look

Their limbs with palsy shook;

Scattered on the earth the crescent banners lay;

Trembled with panic fear

Sabre and targe and spear,

Through the proud armies of the rising day.

Faint was each heart, unnerved each hand;

And, if they strove to charge or stand,

Their efforts were as vain

As his who, scared in feverish sleep

By evil dreams, essays to leap,

Then backward falls again.

With a crash of wild dismay,  
Their ten thousand ranks gave way;  
Fast they broke, and fast they fled;  
Trampled, mangled, dying, dead,  
Horse and horseman mingled lay,  
Till the mountains of the slain  
Raised the valleys to the plain.

Be all the glory to thy name divine!

The swords were ours; the arm, O Lord, was Thine.

The odes of Filicaja do not seem to have roused his countrymen to any poetical emulation. But before he had been long dead, all Europe was ringing with the triumphs of Italy in one department of the fine arts, to which poetry largely contributed—namely, the opera, or musical drama; and one of those who wrote plays in verse to be set to music obtained a colossal reputation, and for many years was almost worshipped by his countrymen—Pietro Metastasio.

The lyric drama, or opera, appears to have assumed a definite form about the year 1600. For a full century musical artists were as they are now, so arrogant that no poet of any real genius, if such there were, cared to write upon the fantastic conditions which they imposed, not only upon metrical but on dramatic form. The evil cured itself, for the poetry of the opera became so miserable that the musicians themselves called for a remedy. The first person of any real poetic power that wrote for the musical stage was Apostolo Zeno, a great man in his day, but whose voluminous operas would hardly repay our scrutiny.

He was made court poet by the Emperor Charles VI, and when he retired, was succeeded by Metastasio. This writer was in one respect a contrast to all the poets we have yet considered, for he was the son of a man in the humblest rank of life, named Trapassi, and was born at Rome on the 3d of January, 1698. His father, who maintained some good connections, did his best to educate him; but what brought him forward was his natural musical talent, his exquisite voice, his early comprehension of its use, and his power of improvisation, always so popular in Italy. These talents literally caught the ear of Gravina, a learned lawyer and student of letters, who agreed with the boy's father to take entire charge of his living and education, and, indeed, of his future. This he did, and carried the process of adoption so far that he had his name changed from the Italian Trapassi to what was supposed to be its Greek equivalent, Metastasio. By Gravina the young man was thoroughly trained in literature, and especially for what had been the great ambition of Gravina's own life, the reform of the Italian stage, which was degraded beyond conception, by the study of dramatic masterpieces in other tongues. He did not, however, let him confine his studies to literature, but included in his training also philosophy and jurisprudence. But this patronage did not last very long, for Gravina died in 1718, leaving to

his young friend a respectable heritage, including, however, three official posts of which Metastasio had firmly expected to secure the succession. In this, however, he was disappointed; the enemies of Gravina, and some who were already jealous of his rising poetical reputation, had the posts transferred to another. He found himself in debt, and hastily transferred his residence to Naples. Here he received good patronage, and composed various pieces for the musical theatre, which added to his reputation; but all these early productions were thrown into the shade by his opera, or musical play, of the "Deserted Dido," which took Naples by storm in 1724, and raised his fame to unrivalled brilliancy in that line of composition.

The story of Dido, as told in Virgil's divine poem, suggests unlimited dramatic opportunities. But when one reads Metastasio's opera, written in the city which Virgil made his home, one knows not whether to cry or laugh. The scene is laid in Carthage; there is a queen named Dido, who has a sister; there are two lovers, Æneas and Iarbas; Æneas sails off to Italy in spite of Dido's efforts to detain him, and she dies a violent death within her city's walls. And these four lines and a half exhaust all the resemblances of the two poems. Language, sentiment, action, tone, are all not merely different but alien; as different as Don Quixote from Richard Cœur de Lion. The whole

story is turned upside down to give room for passionate scenes ending with operatic solos. But Italy went wild over the opera; it was performed everywhere. Its success in Naples was largely owing to an actress called *La Romanina*, with whom Metastasio maintained the closest intimacy. The success of the opera enabled him to pay off his Roman creditors, and he planned living again in Rome. But in 1729 the Emperor Charles VI summoned him to Vienna as court poet in succession to Zeno. He established his father and family in comfort, took an agonizing farewell of *La Romanina*, and left Italy forever, making his home in Vienna from 1730 to his death in 1782. He remained in the highest favor with the emperor till that monarch's death. His daughter Maria Theresa was entirely friendly to the poet, but for two periods in her reign all court festivals had to be kept in check. But for much the greater part of the half-century Metastasio continued to pour out his lyrical plays for music. He was a universal favorite, very benevolent and very modest, refusing many marks of distinction unsuited to his post, never replying to any attack, and honored by proofs of esteem from every one worth knowing. He had the satisfaction of printing a magnificent edition of his works, which he could well afford to do, and of receiving on his death-bed the blessing of Pope Pius VI, then on a visit to the Emperor Joseph II.



The praises which were showered on Metastasio as a poet in his lifetime and since are almost incredible. Rousseau says: "He is the only poet of the heart; the only genius made to move us by the charm of poetic and musical harmony." Voltaire also declares that some of his scenes are equal to the sublimest that Greece has given us. I own I cannot tell what these distinguished men are talking about. I have read a considerable number of his operas, including some that are called divine; and I can find little in dialogue, characters, or plot that rises above commonplace. It seems to me as if a purely conventional set of people, labelled Persians, Greeks, Romans, etc., who might interchange names and situations without injury, lash themselves into fear, love, anger, and jealousy through three acts, violating every record of history, every possibility of situation, and every probability of result in order to make everybody forgiving and happy at the end, and supply songs for all the four voices.

The hash he makes of history and legend is peculiarly irritating. In order to stick to the preposterous unities of place and time, events that actually consumed weeks, or even years, are crowded into hours, and any persons whose names are in the least connected with the hero are brought together into one place where they could not have met without instant slaugh-

ter. He has a drama on Cato,—a man whose fate is as well known as President Lincoln's. Cato and his daughter, Juba, Cæsar and Pompey's widow, Cornelia, all come together within the walls of Utica, Cæsar and Cato's daughter being in love with each other. As if this were not absurd enough, Cornelia is renamed Emilia and Juba Arbaces, because those names are more musical; which is as if Washington, John Adams, Sir William Howe, and General Warren's widow were all to meet in Philadelphia, Mrs. Warren being called Mrs. Hamilton and John Adams (with whose wife Howe is in love) called Hernando Cortez—as more musical.

I suppose that between a devotee of music and one like myself, who cares nothing for it and is a devoted admirer of poetry, there will be endless feud as to setting words to music. But it seems to me the exactions of musical composers and performers will always prevent the highest poetical genius from subjecting his productions to their tyranny. When the poet is dead and cannot help it, we have the result that a play of superhuman beauty like the "Midsummer Night's Dream" has to be subjected to the theories of Mendelssohn, a man whom his warmest admirers will hardly call a musical Shakespeare, who turned Puck into Ariel and destroyed all the charm of the heavenly lyrics.

Where Metastasio does exhibit extraordinary powers of a peculiar kind is this: just before a new scene, that is, before an exit or an entrance, an air is sung, which consists of one or two stanzas in short rhymed couplets. These stanzas are very simple and very beautiful. They have that peculiar poetic melody which instantly seizes on the ear and sings itself. They are like Moore's "Irish Melodies"; and the liquid character of the Italian language, which Metastasio always employs in perfect purity, is exquisitely brought out in these simple lyrics. Sometimes they show the speaker's state of mind in continuation of the dialogue; sometimes general sentiments with entirely appropriate illustrations and similes from nature. Very many of these are from the sea, its forces and perils. Now, as Metastasio knew nothing of the sea at Rome, and less, if one may say so, at Vienna, it is clear that his life at Naples, where the sea is all, took strong hold on him.

I shall attempt what is exceedingly difficult and unsatisfying—a translation of a few of these lovely songs. They are, as the Italians themselves would say, *Italianissimi*. To the rest of Metastasio I do not wish to be unjust, but when one opens at random and finds in one of his admired plays this stuff, contempt is scarcely appeased by the music of the close.

But what to you, ye stars,  
Hath wretched Dirce done, that all these woes

You join against her? You that have inspired  
 The chaste affections in our spirits, you  
 Who at the holy nuptials did attend  
 Give your protection, gods! I am confused;  
 The blow o'erwhelms me so  
 That my heart fails me, and my reason strays.  
     I saw the bay invite me;  
     I thought the wind was quiet;  
     Now by the tempest's riot  
 Away my bark is whirled.  
 And while on rocks that smite me  
     I strove to keep from dashing,  
     On rocks yet fiercer crashing  
 My helpless craft is hurled.

A more vigorous scene is that where Ulysses detects Achilles in woman's dress and urges him to cast it off and come to Troy with him; but the best point in it is deliberately taken from Tasso.

*(Achilles, and Ulysses with Arcas at the side)*

*Ac.* Where am I? What do I hear? I feel the hair  
 Rise on my forehead! What a misty cloud  
 Obscures my vision! What a flame is this  
 Wherefrom I feel enkindled!

I cannot curb myself. To arms! To arms!

*Ul.* Look at him.

*Ac.*

And this lute

Is then Achilles' arms? Ah, no; my fate  
 Others and worthier offers. Down to earth  
 Vile instrument! This weighty buckler here  
 My arm disgraced invites  
 To lift its honored burden; in this hand  
 Let blaze the sword. Ah, I begin again  
 To see myself! O were I but the head  
 Of thousand thousand troops!

*Ul.* And who shall be, if not Achilles here?

*Ac.* Ye gods! what sayst Ulysses?

*Ul.* Mighty soul,  
 Child of the gods, invincible Achilles,  
 Let me at last embrace thee. To pretend,  
 The time is past. Yes, thou the hope of Greece,  
 Her honor art thou.  
 Thou art the dread of Asia; why repress  
 The generous impulses  
 Of thy high mettled heart, worthy of thee?  
 Assist them, noble lord. I know, I see  
 Thou canst not curb thyself. Come, I will lead  
 To laurels and to trophies; Greece in arms  
 Is waiting only thee; Asia, her foe,  
 Cowers at thy name alone. Come.

*Ac.* Yes, I come.

Lead me where'er thou wilt. . . . But . . .

*Ul.* What retains thee?

*Ac.* And Deidamia?

*Ul.* And Deidamia shall  
 One day behold thee with the laurel crowned  
 And worthier of her love.

*Ac.* Meanwhile . . .

*Ul.* Meanwhile

That with the flames of war  
 Is blazing all the earth; from all concealed  
 Wilt thou in vile inaction languish here?  
 The age to come would say:  
 The wall of Dardanus  
 By Diomede was stormed; from Hector won  
 Idomeneus the spoil, and Priam's throne  
 In ashes levelled low  
 Sthenelus, Ajax; what did Achilles do?  
 Achilles in a gown  
 Dragged on his days among the Scyrian maids  
 Mingled and buried, sleeping to the sound  
 Of others' arduous deeds.  
 Be that tale false; awake at length; redeem  
 So grave an error; let no man again  
 Behold thee in these weeds. Ah, couldst thou see

How all must laugh to view  
 A warrior in these trappings! in this shield  
 Mayst see him. Look, Achilles. Tell me true:  
 Dost know thyself?

*Ac.* O shameful, O unworthy  
 Trammels to valor, how could I till now  
 Endure your burden! Lead, Ulysses, lead  
 To don my armor. With these fetters bound  
 Longer I will not stay.

*Ul.* Come. (I have won.)

From "Catone" I take the address of Pompey's  
 widow to his shade:

"If others' foolish loves I hear with pain,  
 And if I still am living since thy doom,  
 Pardon, O spouse beloved,  
 Pardon; no arms I find  
 But these to aid my vengeance. All my love  
 I gave to thee; for thee I keep it; when  
 My weary life shall end, it will remain  
 In the same bonds entwined  
 If the dead love indeed beyond the tomb.  
 O if in some fair planet's gleam  
 Thou keep for me, dear soul, a home,  
 Or on the bank of Lethe's stream,  
 I will not scorn thee,—I will come.  
 Yes, I will come, but be there laid  
 Before me, in a traitor's tomb,  
 The impious tyrant's cruel shade  
 That armed the world, to cause thy doom.

From the "Clemenza di Tito":

Nay, if thou wish to please,  
 From thy suspicions cease;  
 And from thy doubts repeated  
 My weary soul relieve.

He who believes in blindness  
Enforces faith by kindness;  
Who always thinks he's cheated  
Allures us to deceive.

From "Artaserse":

The flood, from ocean parted,  
Valley and mountain bathes.  
Along the river glideth,  
Chained in the ground abideth,  
It groans and murmurs ever  
Till it to ocean come—  
To ocean, where its waters  
It drew, a wayward rover,  
Where, all its wanderings over,  
It hopes to rest at home.

A less important person in the history of Italian poetry, but more so in literature as a whole, is Carlo Goldoni, the reformer, one may say creator, of Italian comedy. Goldoni has written the story of his life and productions, which is infinitely amusing, but the varied adventures are not too easy to follow and impossible to condense. He was born at Venice in 1707, and sucked in comedy with his breath, for his grandfather, a man of some property, had a private theatre at his house. The boy was remarked for his perfect good-nature and sweet temper from the hour of his birth, and no man ever got more content out of really serious troubles. His grandparents dying when he was a mere child left the family embarrassed, and

his father going to Rome to better his fortune, his wife found herself in charge of Charles and a newborn brother. To Charles she devoted herself that he might be trained for a profession. But he read every comedy he could lay his hands on, and wrote one when only eight years old, which was sent to his father at Rome. He was greatly delighted, and encouraged his son's rising talent in every possible way. Having established himself as a physician at Perugia, he followed the grandfather's example in building a private theatre, where the boy was enrolled as one of the actors. Going to Rimini to study philosophy, which he found inexpressibly dull, and being delighted with a company of actors, he quitted studies and teachers, and joined the actors on their journey to Venice, under pretext of visiting his mother, who was then living on the road.

The rebellion was condoned by her delight at seeing the gay, brilliant, sweet-tempered boy again. And so he went on in his father's life and afterwards—now a diligent student at the University of Pavia, now expelled from it for a satire on the townspeople in a quarrel with the students, now holding a financial post by favor of a relation, now taking up successfully the calling of an advocate at Venice, now entangled in a love intrigue in a remote part of the Venetian dominions, and then marrying a Genoese



lady and becoming a devoted husband; now having his property stopped at a custom-house at Rimini, going to interview an Austrian official ten miles off, being deserted by a postilion before he had got far, and walking the rest of the way, which involved fording a stream with his wife on his back, being happily greeted by the officer with compliments and favor for his dramatic talents.

Through all these vicissitudes and a dozen more he kept steadily in view the reform of the comic stage. Comedy was thoroughly popular throughout Italy, but in a singular form. The actors were all masked, and the play, as furnished to them, was little more than the situation with a mere sketch of dialogue, which they were to fill out extempore,—and there were a regular set of conventional characters each displaying the dialect and humor of some particular city. Goldoni proposed to write his comedies at length; he deliberately formed his style on Molière, and proposed to make the interest turn on character and dialogue as well as on situations. In this design he was immensely successful. He contracted with Sacchi, a manager, to furnish four comedies a year for five years. He went so far in advance of any proper demands as to furnish sixteen the very first season. Naturally his health broke down, but his manager would give him nothing beyond his bargain, and put every

difficulty in the way of printing his plays. When his hard contract was ended, he formed a more advantageous connection, and printed his pieces with brilliant success, continuing to pour them out with incredible facility. They are almost all Venetian in character, embodying the peculiarities and dialect of that city. There was some jealousy about their performance in other parts of Italy, and, particularly in Bologna, a hard struggle in favor of the old masked plays. But genius triumphed at length, and Goldoni was recognized all over Italy as the creator of true comedy.

Wherever he went he was received with high honor; the Duke of Parma regularly engaged him for his service. He at length accomplished an early wish to visit Paris. He became attached to the minor court of the daughters of Lewis XV and his son, ladies in whose education he helped. But, as with so many of his predecessors, the attention and payments he received from his royal patrons were very intermittent. Moreover, the pieces he had written for the Italian stage were not so successful as at home, and after many years he took the bold resolution to write in French. The experiment succeeded perfectly. His pieces were played enthusiastically by the best actors, and his court appointments put on a better basis by Lewis XVI. His position in the most cultivated society grew every day stronger, and having outlived

almost all his royal friends, he saw the Revolution break out. This for a time stopped his pension, and he was on the edge of destitution, when, by an extraordinary act of favor, it was restored by the Convention, at the instance of Chénier, the day before Goldoni died; but his wife was not left unprovided for.

This is a very fragmentary selection from one of the wittiest autobiographies in the history of literature. The liveliness of plot, language, and character of Goldoni is beyond dispute. But only a very small portion of his writings, the rhymed comedies, concerns this course. These may very properly be classed with such plays as the "Merchant of Venice" and "Much Ado About Nothing," where a series of incidents which might easily have a tragic end is enlivened by those of an amusing character, and ends happily. One excellent trilogy of Goldoni's plays in verse is called "The Persian Wife," the scene being laid in Ispahan. A young man who has long been attached to a high-spirited Armenian slave, and treated her in all respects as his wife, is called upon by his father to take another wife, the daughter of a powerful friend. He would be very willing to keep both, according to Oriental usages. But the first wife has heard of European ways and insists on being his only wife or none at all. The story is developed in three parts, and ends with the triumph of the father's selection, partly

owing to her sweeter temper and the disposal elsewhere of the captive wife. The comic element is chiefly supplied by two persons of servile rank, and partly, in a gentler way, by a confidential friend of the hero. The whole is immensely spirited. But Goldoni is still under the influence of the theory, by virtue of which Continental writers shudder at Shakespeare, that there is a certain dignity even in comedy, and that heroes and heroines, kings and princesses, must never make a joke, all the fun coming from an inferior class. To such Prince Hal is an outrage; they would be willing to have a prince break his father's heart by dissipation, but he must not be funny.

Another excellent comedy of Goldoni's is "The Dalmatian Lady," founded on the incident of a captivity among the Moors of Tetuan, which was indeed much too probable an event to be very amusing in the ports of Italy in 1750. The incidents and characters are very lively, and the contrast between the chivalry, not only of the Venetian captives, but of the Moorish lord himself, with the meanness of a slave-broker, is capital. These metrical comedies owe no small part of their life to the verse. This is called *Martelliana*, from a poet of the preceding generation. It is the metre of the oldest Latin poets, and in them is called *Saturnian*; it is also the metre of "The Cid" and "The Niebelungen," and, as Macaulay says,

(though, strangely enough, he misquotes it) of the nursery rhyme,

The king was in the parlor, counting out his money;  
The queen was in the kitchen, eating bread and honey.

This metre falls easily into English, as the following extract from "The Dalmatian Lady" shows:

- M.* The poor unlucky creature! How sad her situation!  
Oh if it would only please her, I 'd give her consolation.
- C.* Oh! Oh! to give her comfort, she's looking for another;  
And if she felt like changing, you would n't suit her,  
brother.
- M.* So then, if her Lisaurus she finds remaining true,  
No interest in my pity has Argenis: and you?
- C.* I don't despise your pity, but let 's be comprehending;  
By this fine name of pity, pray what are you intending?
- M.* Exactly what you wish me; your looks are very nice,  
And willingly to buy you, I'd fork out any price.  
Three wives are at my orders, and that with us is few.  
With all my heart I offer the place of fourth to you.
- C.* I never dealt in courting till now in all my life.  
I'd rather not begin it to be a Turkish wife;  
With but a single husband four consorts by uniting  
I think one makes it certain there always would be  
fighting;  
And if enforced agreement 's a Turkish institution,  
So beautiful a custom don't suit my constitution.
- M.* They've really quite bewitched me, these lovely eyes of  
blue!  
To win her gracious favor, there's naught I would not do.  
Enough. I want to buy her, and when I've bought, to  
marry,  
By force or inclination, it's here she'll have to tarry.  
The fashions of her nation she'll find don't suit our  
plans;  
With all these haughty ladies we simply use rattans;

And if among our spouses there should break out a  
quarrel,

We find a stick efficient to emphasize a moral.

I have pointed out how, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a manly effort was made by Tassoni to give a stronger tone to poetry by the use of satire. A still more vigorous effort of the same kind was made nearly two centuries later by Casti.

John Baptista Casti was born in 1721, but of his early life we know little. He became a professor in a seminary at Montepulciano and bore, like Metastasio, the title of Abate, whatever that quasi-clerical term may imply. He had a great taste for travelling, and gladly accepted an invitation from the tutor of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, afterwards the Emperor Leopold II, to return with him to Vienna. He was well received by the Emperor Joseph II, who, after the death of Metastasio, gave him the title, in his case apparently an honorary one, of Court Poet. But his great delight was to join the retinue of various ambassadors. In this way he visited St. Petersburg, Berlin, Dresden, and some lesser German courts. After Joseph's death he took up his abode in Florence, and at the age of seventy-seven went to Paris, where he ended his life.

He was a very delightful companion, his travels enabling him to fill his conversation with amusing sto-

ries. He was a voluminous writer, and, even in old age, hardly let a day pass without composing a novel, as it was called—that is, a rhymed story in the style of Boccaccio's "Decameron." These stories are very witty, and the verse is excellent, but the excessive freedom of the tone soon becomes nauseous. Casti lived to the age of eighty-two, and died unexpectedly after taking cold. His great work, which he completed and printed at eighty-one, is called "Animali Parlanti," or "Talking Beasts."

This is a mock-epic in twenty-six cantos. It is in six-lined stanzas, which admit of easier play than eight-line. The theme is that, in prehistoric ages, the quadrupeds, stirred up by the dog, voted to establish a hereditary monarchy. Many candidates were proposed, but the lion and the elephant alone were really considered. The dog's eloquence carried it for the lion and he was crowned. At once a court is organized with all due form. The dog becomes prime minister, the bull grand marshal, the ape master of ceremonies, the cat chief of police, the tigress chief lady of the bedchamber. All goes well till the lion-king sickens and dies. The lioness being appointed regent for her sadly deficient son, new officers have to be appointed. The ass is the boy-king's governor and the parrot his tutor. The fox soon contrives to supplant the dog, who goes in high dudgeon to find the elephant in his

retirement, and being speedily joined by the tigress, starts a rebellion. The first attempt to reduce it by force proving eminently unsuccessful, the quadruped regent enters into an alliance with the eagle, queen of the birds. Whereupon the rebels ally themselves with the great dragon, emperor of the reptiles. The plot is worked out through every variety of truce, negotiation, intrigue, battle, and what not. It ends with a great cataclysm, the few surviving animals losing the gift of speech.

It is all immensely witty. It is the bitterest kind of satire on what Casti had seen in his long life at great courts and little courts and under the new French republic. The weakness of kings, the heartlessness of ministers, the meanness of courtiers, the humbug of diplomats, the utter disregard of the people, are shown under the disguise of different animals. There is not a public or official character whom Casti does not clothe in exactly the right animal skin. Does he want a noble and faithful subject, loathing all court tricks and bribes, but trying to save a worthless master in counsel and in the field? There is the horse! Is it proposed to establish a court journal to translate all rumors and news into forms favorable to the court interest, and is an editor wanted? There is the magpie, in Italian *gazza*, whence, says Casti, is derived gazette. Is there wanted a solemn ecclesiastic to de-



clare the counsels of that mysterious being, the Grand Cucú? Lo, you have the owl!

The allegory is sometimes tedious, and runs into details quite absurd as applied to beasts and birds; but these are relieved by bursts of seriousness, where Casti, without mask or cloak, pours out his contempt and wrath on the wickedness and folly of those who rule the nations. And truly, to one who had studied Catherine of Russia, Frederic the Great and his successor, Joseph and Leopold, the smaller German princes, and the French Directory, no wrath could be too hot, no sarcasm too biting. It is a little strange that Bonaparte should have allowed the "*Animali Parlanti*" to be published, but it was doubtless his game to let all other sovereigns be held up to contempt.

Hereat arrived, the ambassador, Lord Fox,  
And faithful dragoman, Sir Popinjay,  
Began the task of climbing up the rocks;  
But woe if once he let a footstep stray;  
Down he would tumble from the rugged ledge  
Precipitate upon the water's edge.

The pinion-bearing quadrupedal things  
That were assigned him as his equipage  
Moved on, assisting him with feet and wings  
At every inconvenient mountain stage;  
So safe and sound at length by their support,  
The fox attained at last the eagle's court.

The centre of her home the eagle stood,  
Within the rocky mountain's highest cleft;

As minister, a bird of mightiest brood,  
A fierce and stalwart vulture at her left,  
The ancestor of him of whom 't is said  
That on Prometheus' liver he was fed.

Ruffling her wings, her great eyes glow and blaze;  
With golden plumes her back was covered o'er;  
Full on the sun she sets her fearless gaze  
When o'er the clouds she spreads her vans to soar:  
Whence Greece of yore her foolish legends told,  
And gave her claws the thunderbolt to hold.

When, with his solemn pomp and stately train,  
The awful presence of the aerial queen  
The envoy of the lion could attain,  
And made his bow most reverent to be seen,  
An eloquent harangue he then unsheathed  
That Cicero's own self could scarce have breathed.

"O royal bird, that with sublimest flight  
Dost run athwart the fields of air immense,  
Lifting thyself to an unmeasured height,  
O'er flame and bolt, where are thy deeds? thy sense?  
Prepare the terrors of thy beak and claws  
Thine own to shelter and the common cause.

"In danger stands the splendor of the throne,  
In danger is the honor of the crowns;  
If force united to the pride full blown  
Of daring beasts shall not prescribe some bounds,  
Soon shall we see—'t is true past doubting—all  
The animalian kingdoms meet their fall.

"If to beat down the four-foot empire try  
Those wanton, treacherous, and rebellious herds,  
Keep thou the dread contagion in thine eye;  
Soon will there come the like among the birds.  
When crimes unpunished go, we know full well  
The numbers of the criminals they swell.

“Wherefore, commissioned by my king, I came  
To offer thee reciprocal alliance  
Un sullied to maintain the monarch’s name  
And bid our empire’s enemies defiance.  
For, if one king the powers of hell should ravage,  
All other kings will be not worth a cabbage.”

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O honor, honor! Cruel god! Mankind—  
To worship thee must countless treasure spend;  
Who with thy juggling tricks the world dost blind,  
And name and cloak to crimes enormous lend,  
Shifting like Proteus still, and to our eyes  
Dost scarce disclose thyself in truthful guise.

Not here to private outrage I allude.

If e’er a foeman stabs his foeman’s heart,  
Or if a friend in homicidal feud,  
By slight punctilio urged, a jealous smart  
Against his friend be to deal a blow bestung,—  
’Tis public wickedness that arms my tongue.

The slaughter and the cruel butchery,  
The universal suffering of man,  
Of living men the wreck and misery,  
Is honor! honor! named by the mad clan  
That plies war’s trade; and honor! honor! still  
The politician’s bloody mouth will fill.

If such thou art, O fatal deity,  
That scatterest the seed of countless woe,  
If such thou art as we are wont to see  
When hostile passion lets its fury go,  
Far be thy ghastly image from our path,  
And heaven destroy thee in avenging wrath!

## CHAPTER VII

### ALFIERI

THE degeneration of Italian poetry at the time of our Independence was so great that its restoration was sure to be a revolution—a harsh and violent process by which a Cromwell or Napoleon should strike a rude but necessary blow at the luscious languors which did duty for form, sense, and feeling. And certainly the master's hand, when he did come, was no gentle one.

Vittorio Alfieri was born at Asti in Piedmont in 1749, on the 17th of January, forty-three years after Franklin; and, like Franklin, he has told us the story of his own life and literary work with a fearless candor which stands in most honorable contrast to the artificiality of the style which he combated so gallantly and victoriously. He belonged to a noble family, of considerable wealth, well disposed to advance him either in the army or diplomacy, the only occupations which it was supposed an Italian nobleman could follow, if only he would meekly fall into the ways of his world. But to that his nature said “No!” He

was put to school very young in a college at Turin, under little supervision except that of a family servant, who tyrannized over him for his own pleasure. Here Alfieri went through a variety of subjects under rules not in themselves absurd, but sure to gall a fiery, original spirit which longed to do something great and free, yet had not the faintest idea of what that something might be. Piedmont was then under a pure despotism; the king had many of the noble qualities of his gallant house, but was wholly bound by the monarchical and ecclesiastical traditions of the Bourbons, to whom he was nearly allied, and unable to give impulse or guidance to any scheme of national elevation. The academy where Alfieri was placed, with its petty restrictions, its old-world studies, and its utter want of expansion and freedom, was a type of the nation; and he developed, at a very early age, a love of liberty, and a hatred of anything like tyranny, which breaks out in a score of ways throughout his life and his poems.

At fourteen, by the laws of Piedmont, he was released from guardianship, and came into possession of considerable property. His first use of comparative freedom was to travel—comparative, since by the same laws no nobleman could leave the country without the king's consent. Alfieri visited the principal Italian cities, with a kind of tutorial companion

and a long train of servants. Having a smattering of several branches of learning, and an accurate knowledge of none; speaking moderately good French with strangers, and with his own people the wretched patois of Piedmont, and knowing less of refined and classical Italian than he did of Latin, he rushed from state to state, seeing little and learning less of what better equipped travellers seek to see and know. He had scarcely got back from this Italian trip than the passion for travelling broke out again, and casting off any tutor's care, he pushed his explorations through France, which he always hated, England, which he always enjoyed, and Holland. At every stage of his travels he found his proud, sensitive, exclusive temper chafed by a score of uncongenial encounters; and became quite conscious of his own ignorance, and unfitness to grapple with the world which showed him such low and unattractive characters. Accordingly, as soon as he could rest at home, he began to work in his own way at the studies which had taken no hold of him as a boy under others. He became fully aware that the language of his own country was scarcely known to him. He read eagerly the four great poets, especially Ariosto, of which he had gained some surreptitious knowledge in his school-days, and Macchiavelli, whom he justly thought the master of Italian prose. Soon he was off on a longer

journey, extended to countries which Italians rarely visited,—Sweden, Denmark, Russia, and Prussia. Everywhere he sought to study institutions, and cultivated, as far as a strange, fastidious pride would allow him, intelligent company. But he manifested nowhere the interest in natural scenery which travellers now always affect and sometimes feel, nor yet in art or architecture. His dislike of France was confirmed, and so was his love of England and English liberty; but he construed the latter with strange latitude, getting entangled in a wretched love intrigue with the wife of Lord Ligonier, a very distinguished soldier of those days, with whom he fought a duel, only to find that the object of his passion was as unworthy of her lover as she had been of her husband. This miserable experience of foreign parts did not check his persistency in travel, which he pushed as far as Lisbon and Cadiz. Returning at last to Turin, he established himself in luxury among his young literary, or would-be literary, friends, only to become involved in another love-affair, to which he surrendered himself with his usual unchecked ardor, finding himself unable to break it off, though he tried to set against this passion his other passion for travelling, going many leagues with a large suite, and then returning in secret and alone. At last, his mistress being in ill health and confined to solitude and quiet, he was

seated one day in her apartments unoccupied, and at hand some leaves of writing-paper. On these, to amuse himself, he proceeded to sketch certain scenes between Cleopatra and her confidante, though he says he might as well have called his heroine Berenice or Zenobia, being led to the name of Cleopatra only because the tapestries of his lady's apartment exhibited the story of Cleopatra and Antony. When his paper was exhausted he thrust the sketch under the cushion of the sofa, and there the leaves remained untouched for more than a year,—neat housekeeping, that!—till, returning from one of his journeys with a firm resolution to terminate his love-affair, he withdrew his dramatic attempt, and set to work to complete and revise it. In this he persevered, and when his chains were finally broken he confined himself almost entirely to his house for a long time, sallying forth only for exercise on horseback. For not inferior to his passion for travelling was that for horse-flesh, which made him many times buy and transport horses at great expense, of which he sometimes gave one away, but scarcely ever sold any.

In his confinement he worked over his “Cleopatra,” rewriting it again and again; he renewed his studies in Italian literature, to give it purity of diction and elegance of form; and finally brought the five acts to completion, so that it was possible to



act the play. His knowledge of dramatic form was slender indeed. He had, in his journeys to France, seen some tragic masterpieces performed at Marseilles and at Paris. He had read translations of the Greek plays in French and in Latin, and he speaks at one time of reading Shakespeare, or rather of ceasing to read him, for fear of injuring his originality. But in "*Cleopatra*" we can trace no models but French. It was performed by a company of ladies and gentlemen in Turin, and in order to deprecate, or rather defy, criticism, Alfieri composed for it a poetical afterpiece, a curious half-mythological effusion in prose, of which one character is Orpheus, and the special meaning must have defied the penetration of the auditors. The "*Cleopatra*" was not ill received; and, indeed, though it has no very great force in language or thought, must have made its originality felt by all its hearers. Alfieri speaks of it with extreme contempt, and omitted it from the authorized edition of his tragedies. Yet this play deserves notice for more reasons than one.

The whole scheme is French. The unities of time, place, and action are strictly preserved. Everything takes place in the palace at Alexandria, after the flight from Actium and the arrival of Antony, with Augustus in hot pursuit. The plot turns on the efforts of Cleopatra to keep Antony's love till the arrival of

Cæsar shall enable her to make terms with him and retain her kingdom at any cost. Unable to see a clear road before her, she tries to procure Antony's assassination. Failing herein, and driven to bay by the coldness of Cæsar and the manly contempt of Antony, who, rather than yield either to treachery or patronage, stabs himself in her presence, she does the like, more from spite than true heroism.

There is perhaps no more departure from history in such a plot than any dramatist has a right to use for his purpose, although Shakespeare found it possible to construct "Antony and Cleopatra" without contradicting Plutarch. But what no reader of that play, or of Fletcher's "False One," or Dryden's "All for Love" can forgive in Alfieri is his depriving Cleopatra of all her historic charm. Her lover, her conqueror, her dependents, instead of a royal enchantress have to deal with a spiteful witch, who, in her straining to be supremely clever, cannot see that she is throwing away the very charms that brought Cæsar to her feet. Augustus is given something of the magnanimity of his later years, and Antony has his Roman manhood portrayed in generous lines beyond even history. But the sympathy that goes with Cleopatra through every scene of Shakespeare wholly fails us for the artificial *intrigante* of Alfieri. How far he is right in criticising

the language and metrical construction of his piece, no foreigner dare say. The former seems pure Tuscan, and the latter, though wanting the nervous and penetrating force of his later work, seems to move firm and true. But an author's stern censures of his own work are generally sound.

Good or bad, the completion and performance of "Cleopatra" fixed Alfieri to tragedy as the proper line for his ambition to take. He composed in various other kinds of poetry, and also in prose, many pieces, into some of which he put heart and fire; but it is as a tragedian that he will be renowned. And he was thoroughly right in his choice; for tragedy was the department in which Italian poets had done least, and that little not well. In no line of composition was there greater need of firmness, directness, and passion. Accordingly, for several years, Alfieri set himself to search out and cast into a poetic form a number of tragic themes drawn from mythology, from ancient and mediæval history, and from Scripture, and executed his work by a process as rapid, one, too, which in any other man's hands would have been as mechanical, as if he had been the veriest hack-writer, turning out plays for his daily bread. He felt such entire distrust of his own Italian that, having selected the subjects of his first two plays, he sketched them in French prose, which he was afterwards to turn

into Tuscan verse. But he soon saw the absurdity of such a process, and at once determined to spare no pains to acquire the habit of thinking in the tongue in which he meant to write. He subjected himself, accordingly, at thirty years of age, to a rigid course of grammatical and metrical training in Italian and Latin, which would be irksome to a school-boy. Understanding that the purest Italian was spoken at Sienna, he made that city his residence for a time, and formed some intimacies there which were of great interest and comfort in a life too much swayed by wayward independence. Under this stern discipline he completed, in a comparatively short time, fourteen tragedies, superior to anything of the kind in Italian before or since. Later he added five more.

I reserve the discussion of the matter, force, and style of these plays till I have completed the survey of the poet's life. While engaged in study and composition, he visited Rome and contracted a new passion, which is the most singular in the whole story of Petrarch's successors. Conspicuous among the residents of the Eternal City was Charles Edward Stewart, the "Prince Charlie" of 1745, who had been since 1766 the rightful King of England in the opinion of a few harmless fanatics. In 1772 he had been persuaded to marry, and his choice fell on Louisa, of the princely German house of Stolberg. She was

thirty years younger than he, and miserable from the day of her marriage. Charles had sunk into a mere sot, who could sometimes be aroused into something like his old fire by the sight of an English uniform or a talk about the Highlanders; but the worst of his ancestors never presented so repulsive a spectacle as he used to do to the families of Rome. His wife found living with him impossible; and just at that time her path was crossed by Alfieri, the most fiery and indomitable of spirits. From that time they lived only for each other. With extreme difficulty the poet controlled himself so as not to embarrass the lady of his heart by the importunity of his affection; but as soon as a separation from the Pretender was achieved, he followed her footsteps everywhere, —to Alsace, to Paris, and finally to Florence, which was his home, as far as such a restless soul could have a home. It can hardly be doubted that this connection, like a similar but far less creditable one of Byron's, saved Alfieri from worse displays of passion.

Having composed and printed fourteen tragedies, he turned his pen to other themes. He wrote a treatise on Tyranny; he wrote satires; being an Italian, of course he wrote sonnets. He had done some translating in his early days, and now resumed and completed versions of Virgil, Sallust, and Terence. Again tragedy attracted him, and five more plays

were composed, as well as a fantastic piece on the death of Abel, partly dramatic and partly musical, which he dubbed a *tra-melo-gedia*.

His first plays had been seen through the press by a literary friend in Sienna, named Gori, to whom he was most tenderly attached, but who died while Alfieri was following his countess across the Alps. This was a very serious misfortune to him; but one element of the distress it caused him was ludicrous. The Countess of Albany—for so the Pretender's wife was designated—electing to live at Paris in the winter and near Strasburg in the summer, Alfieri determined to intrust the printing of a more complete and accurate edition of his writings to the Didots. He found himself forced to engage in the untried task of proof-correcting and revising, and if he had been called upon to set up and ink the types himself, he could not have chafed and declaimed against the work more vehemently, as unworthy of a nobleman and a poet. He found the celebrated Bipontine press at Strasburg more amenable to his fastidious and sensitive notions.

One singular episode of this period of his life was a third voyage to England, purely to buy horses, of which he himself led a string of fourteen from London to Florence over Mount Cenis, which he openly says he considers to have been a passage not

much less arduous than Hannibal's. He had now broken off wholly from his native kingdom, making over his large estates to his sister, with the reservation of an annuity, and resisting the eager appeals of his mother, whom he speaks of as faultless, to come home and marry a most eligible young lady. The only member of his ancient house who had ever won a laurel crown, he could not spare the time to lay a leaf of it at his mother's feet.

His tragedies, though exposed to much sharp criticism, seem to have made their way to public favor very soon; indeed, they are too original and too powerful to have done otherwise, especially as, unlike much modern original and powerful poetry, every one can understand them. They were recognized as adding another string to the Italian lyre. How far their author might have enjoyed this reputation, or what relation he would have sustained to his country in future, never can be guessed, for everything was broken up for him, as for so many millions of men, by the French Revolution.

Alfieri was exactly one of those men to whom the doings of the Jacobins would afford unlimited disgust, with no sense of relief or compensation. He had long detested tyranny and loved liberty, with all the force of his ardent nature; he had dedicated his "Agis" to the shade of Charles I in a strain

of the keenest irony, and his "Brutus" to the living Washington with expressions of the profoundest respect. He had refused to bow at the footstool of Frederic the Great, and he never failed to express his admiration for the polity of England. But his love for liberty was akin to Edmund Burke's, and the tyranny, as stupid as it was malignant, which Marat and St. Just paraded under that august name disgusted even more than it shocked him. He made his way from Paris as speedily as he could after the Jacobin *régime* was thoroughly seated, sacrificing his library, and returned to Florence to pass the rest of his life.

His energy and force of will in literature are inconceivable. He composed a bitter diatribe against the French, called "Misogallo"; he completed a new translation of Virgil; wrote half a dozen comedies to help fill that deficiency in classical Italian; and at an age when most men cease from study at all resolved to go to the fountain-head and learn to read the Greek authors in the original. In this resolution he persevered with good success; and finally adopted the fantastic scheme of founding a literary order called the Knights of Homer, with an emblematic collar; though beyond himself as Grand Master, it seems never to have had an existence. At the same time he refused, with the bitterest scorn, a proposal



from the French revolutionary governor of Turin to become a member of a new literary academy at that place.

After fifty-four years of a life which had known no rest since boyhood, the fiery soul began to wear upon the tenement of clay that enshrined it. He brought down his candid and fearless autobiography to May, 1803; and when autumn came, the gout, complicated by other disorders, and most by the obstinacy of the patient, pressed him harder and harder, and Alfieri died on the 7th of October, 1803. A stately monument, the work of Canova, erected by the devotion of her whom he loved so fondly, exhibits his medallion to all the world in Santa Croce. An American traveller, studying the memorials in that most interesting church, and recording his reflections in verse, gives Alfieri these two lines:

Here too at length the indomitable will  
And fiery pulse of Asti's bard are still.

And these two phrases, or their equivalent, must be used by every one who seeks even to sketch his character and works. His life, like those of Dante, of Petrarch, of Tasso, is inseparably entwined with his poetry. It should seem that one born and trained as he was might have gone for years without being really conscious of intellectual powers above the common; and even if conscious of them would have al-

lowed them to be directed into channels nearer at hand. The iron resolution by which he tore the crown of tragic excellence from the hand of inattentive Fate has no parallel in literary history. For his achievement was a great deal more than composing twenty striking tragedies: he created the Italian tragic stage. It is, of course, impossible even to sketch all his dramas; but much that may be said of one may be of all.

From Greek mythology he takes seven subjects; from Greek history, two; from Roman history, six; from the history of mediæval and modern Europe, five; and from the Scriptures, "Saul" and "Abel." In his ancient subjects he invites comparison with the Greek tragedians and Seneca; with Shakespeare, in "Brutus" and "Cleopatra"; with Corneille, in "Sophonisba"; with Voltaire, in "Brutus" and "Merope"; and with Schiller, in "Mary Stewart" and "Philip II." In such cases, we are apt to prefer the plays with which we are earliest familiar. But Alfieri, of all writers, handles a well-known theme most completely in his own way.

He has told us precisely his method of composition. He first selected the theme, and sketched the play as to its general outline and development. He then drew out elaborately in prose its acts, scenes, and dialogue, and finally turned the prose into verse. He

had at times in his desk two and even three plays, in the various stages of his unvarying method.

These plays are all constructed on a single model. The action is single, and the characters are few; occasionally a whole people or an army is sent to fill the stage; but, as a rule, half a dozen persons or less have it all to themselves. The unities of time and place are strictly adhered to. A few hours see the whole through in one spot. Some one central passion, or conflict of two passions, is represented as raging in the heart of the principal character, and driving him to a mournful end. Usually the conflict is between family ties, on the one hand, and some impulse of patriotism, or love of dominion, or fancied right, on the other. In many plays, two characters who ought to be acting together for a good end are kept apart by an intriguer, who works for the stronger, filling his ear with false tales of the weaker, while deluding the feebler with false hopes of the mightier. On the whole, Alfieri loves best to hold up to horror the excesses of tyranny, the delight in trampling on family and country from the mere passion of arbitrary power. Sometimes such a person succeeds only too well, while the side that holds one's sympathy loses all but honor; in other plays fate accords with our hopes and right prevails.

In almost all Alfieri's personages there is a stern

and sometimes savage penetration. They may be, as I have said, utterly deceived by a trickster; but they never fail to understand the situation as it is presented. Much of the dialogue is argument; keen, clear, vigorous statement of one line of duty, one call of sentiment or passion as against another, with very little waste as each disputant puts his own meaning strongly and catches his opponent's. There is none of the snappish bickering so contemptible in Seneca, and which disfigures even some of the great Greek tragedies; on the other hand, there is none of the wearisome stateliness of the French stage. The dialogue is like a spirited debate between party leaders in a great senate; and yet the debate in "Brutus the Younger," which precedes Cæsar's murder, is one of the least successful of Alfieri's discussions. This play of opposing passions in his great persons may well be named "nervous."

It has been said that these touch us on the side of reason and mind only,—that they do not affect us tenderly. It seems to me an unjust censure. No doubt his taste ran rather to the sterner and harder characters. But in two of his very earliest plays, "Philip" and "Antigone," Isabella and Argia show true tenderness; and when he had ceased to think in French, he could portray in Bianca, in Myrrha, and in Michal characters where the fierce

temper of Dante ceases to sway him, and he shows a kindly sensibility worthy of Tasso.

It has been much more truly said that there is little exercise of imagination or fancy, very little illustration or pictorial delineation. This is very true, and to those who expect a dramatist's imagination to run riot, and his characters, when swayed by exalting or crushing passion, to talk about everything in heaven or earth except what fills their souls, will find Alfieri dry and dull. This is sad, and it is still sadder to think that he probably would not have comprehended this complaint of his deficiency. He could not have been made to see what Philip's jealousy of Don Carlos, or Virginius's wrath with Appius, or Mary Stewart's contempt of Darnley, or Saul's yearning for David, had to do with the birds and the forests, the rocks and the clouds. Even in "Saul," where he borrows the transcendent storm-pictures of the Psalmist, those pictures are, as they are in David's own poems, merely the garments and veils of the Eternal. Alfieri's men and women have far too serious concerns in their own lives and hearts to be stringing together metaphors from nature.

And so, there is in these tragedies very little action, —what the jargon of the modern theatre calls "business." There are no stage-directions for dresses, scenery, or movements. At the fatal crisis the dealing or

thwarting of the death-stroke is mentioned in a footnote. Not that these plays fail in representation: they give abundant chance for the kings and queens of the theatre to bring out the deepest emotion by tones and movements; but the poet gives the words alone, and leaves the rendering to the actors.

In a word, Alfieri's drama has no decoration. It is as severe as a Doric temple, not so much disdain-ing varied and ornamental detail, as complete without them; the picture of mighty passions swaying kindred or rival souls, and showing themselves in their elementary nature. He tried in "Abel" to go back to the primitive world, before sin and death were known. But he carries us back far more truly to the primitive world in "Myrrha" and "Merope," in "Saul" and "Sophonisba," in the Medici and the Stewarts. There is in all these due reference to what legend and Scripture and history have to say of the age and locality. Rome and Florence, Thebes and Madrid, are duly set before us; but those who people them have the masks of time and place stripped off, and we are brought face to face with created man,—the red clay of earth into which God has breathed his Spirit. The verse in which these stern, fiery natures speak seems like an echo of Dante, yet Alfieri, naturally discarding his master's interlocking rhyme, has used the severest of blank verse. It was

needful, by a strong and even a harsh effort, to break away from all the chanted lusciousness into which the Tuscan lyre had melted, from Petrarch's period to Metastasio's. If that lyre was ever to recover its lost manhood, it must revive the manhood of Dante; it must not fear ruggedness, and trust to its ardor, its truth, its dignity, to acquire a music and a charm of its own. And that it has acquired. We must look to Lucretius, or, better, to "Paradise Regained," for strains so austere and so penetrative in their cadences.

It is hard to select from so many plays those which best show Alfieri's powers. The Roman plays, in which his peculiar aristocratic hatred of royal tyranny comes out strongest, seem to me, for that very reason, unreal. His Romans, though full of force and wit, are conformed to a conventional standard, unlike the living Coriolanus, Brutus, Cassius, and Antony which Shakespeare took from Plutarch. The contrast is harshest in the "Second Brutus"; here, in order to bring about the conflict in the hero's mind, required by stage convention, he follows the preposterous legend that Brutus was actually Cæsar's son; then, in order to prevent his committing a crime of superhuman atrocity, makes him merely witness and assent to the slaughter by Cassius and the rest.

Alfieri's first tragedy, after he definitely selected

that line of writing, was "Philip." One can hardly doubt that Schiller had this in mind when he wrote his "Don Carlos,"—a fine play, but one whose prolixity contrasts badly with Alfieri's compression. The characters are all such as Alfieri loves to draw, and draws well;—the gloomy, bigoted, suspicious king, jealous of every one, and of his son most of all, whom he has cheated out of his bride; the son, in whom noble purposes struggle in vain against the killing compression of the Spanish court, finding his best impulses systematically misconstrued, tortured by being obliged to live in the daily presence of his lost bride; Isabella herself, her heart broken, or rather frozen within her, sustained in the sepulchral path of duty by the timid hope that she may reconcile father and son. Alongside of these are placed, as good and bad angels, Perez, the gallant friend, and Gomez, the insidious inquisitor, who helps work out the diabolical plot whereby the father orders the assassination of the son, and breaks his wife's heart. In perhaps the most striking scene Philip conceals Gomez while he accuses his son before his wife, and leads her on to defend him.\*

*Phi.* The prince! yes, many intercepted letters,  
Clandestine messages, seditious words,  
Pronounced incautiously, of this dire fact

\* These passages of Alfieri are from the version of Charles Lloyd, the friend of Lamb and Coleridge.



Too certainly convince me! I conjure thee  
To picture to thy mind my agonies,  
A sire betray'd, a circumvented king!  
And to pronounce what lot by justice falls  
From me, his sire, on such an impious son?

*Isa.* Oh, God! Thou wilt that I pronounce his fate?

*Phi.* Yes, thou of that art arbitress supreme.  
Fear not the monarch, flatter not the father:  
Pronounce.

*Isa.* I fear alone offended justice.  
Before the throne's imposing solitude,  
By artifice iniquitous, the cause  
Of guilt and innocence is oft confounded.

*Phi.* Canst thou then doubt of what thy king affirms?  
Who more than I can wish him innocent?  
But though my rage be mute, stern policy  
Moves me to speak. Alas! the voice of father,  
That agonizing voice, resounds within me.

*Isa.* Ah, hear that voice! No voice can equal it.  
Perhaps he is less a culprit than thou thinkest;  
Indeed his guilt on this emergency  
Seems too impossible to challenge credence.  
Hear him thyself, whatever be his crimes:  
Who than a son, between a son and father,  
Can be a mediator more persuasive?  
Granted that he be haughty with a train  
Not friendly to the truth, assuredly  
Thy presence will subdue his pride. To him  
Open thine ears, and harden not thy heart  
To the soft influence of paternal love.  
Him to thy presence never dost thou summon,  
Never speak to him. He approaches thee  
Impress'd with fear; and love and confidence  
Are scared by thy inflexible reserve.  
Revive within him, if it be suppressed,  
His native virtue; 't is impossible  
That, in thy son, it can be quite extinguished.  
To no one else trust thy paternal cares.

Present to him the aspect of a father;  
 Reserve a monarch's majesty for others.  
 What, from a generous heart, may not be gain'd  
 By generous treatment? If he be convicted  
 Of some delinquency (and who is perfect?),  
 To him alone do thou alone display  
 Thy just resentment. . . .

There is affection in a father's wrath;  
 What son can witness it and tremble not?  
 Suspicions not thine own tear from thy heart;  
 And leave base apprehensions of foul treason  
 To monarchs who deserve to be betray'd.

*Phi.* This action, worthy of thyself, is thine  
 Alone; to make the cry of nature reach  
 A father's heart, ah, others act not thus!  
 Oh, wretched lot of kings, they cannot utter,  
 Tremble to utter, much less dare obey,  
 Nature's benign affections.

Thou now shalt see that to the guilty prince  
 I can appear, more than is fit, a father;  
 If I must ever be compell'd to meet him  
 In all the terrors of a king offended—

*Isa.* I do not doubt thy promise. But he comes:  
 Suffer me to depart.

*Phi.* Stay; I command thee.

*Isa.* I have ventured to express my thoughts to thee  
 Since thou wouldst have it so. Why tarry longer?  
 The presence of a step-dame, when a son  
 Meets an offended father, were intrusive.

*Phi.* Intrusive? No. Thou much deceivest thyself;  
 Thou art a necessary witness.  
 Thou hast alone a step-dame's name. For once  
 From thy remembrance banish e'en the name.  
 Thy presence will be grateful to my son.  
 Ah, see, he comes; and he shall not be ignorant  
 That, of thy own accord, thou hast pledged thyself  
 As surety for his virtue, faith, and love.

[*Enter Carlos*

*Phi.* Approach me, prince. Now tell me when will dawn  
That day in which, with the fond name of son,  
Thy father may accost thee. Thou shouldst see  
(Ah, wouldst thou have it so!) blended at once  
The name of father and of king; ah, why,  
Since thou lov'st not the one, fear'st not the other?

*Car.* Father, at last from doubt deliver me:  
What have I done?

*Phi.* So manifold thy crimes,  
That doubt of which shall prompt my just reproach,  
Serves thee instead of innocence. Now hear me.  
Say, hast thou not had commerce with that soil  
Where most the furnace of sedition blazes?  
E'en in my palace, didst thou not perchance,  
Before the dawn of day, clandestinely,  
A trait'rous and protracted audience give  
To the orator of the Batavian rebels?  
To that base miscreant who comes begging pity,  
If you believe his words, but who, in heart,  
Perfidious machinations cherishes,  
And projects of rebellion unavenged.

*Car.* Father, must my most unimportant actions  
Be all ascribed to guilt? 'T is true I spoke  
At length to the ambassador; 't is true  
That I, with him, compassionate the fate  
Of those thy hapless subjects, and I dare  
Avow the same compassion in thy presence.  
Nor thou thyself wouldst long withhold thy pity  
Provided that, like me, thou hadst heard at length  
Of the iron government in which, oppressed  
Beneath proud, avaricious, inexpert,  
Weak, cruel, yet unpunished ministers,  
So many years they have groan'd. For their misfortunes  
My heart with pity bleeds; I boldly own it.

And say, wouldst thou, that I, the son of Philip,  
Possessed a vulgar or a cruel heart?

The hope, perhaps, was too presumptuous  
That I, with stating the unvarnished truth,  
Could wake, this day, thy bosom to compassion.  
But how can I be thought to offend a father  
In holding him accessible to pity?

If thou on earth dost wish to represent  
The Ruler of the skies, what attribute  
Like that of mercy fixes the resemblance?  
But, notwithstanding, of my punishment  
Thou art arbiter supreme, if I appear,  
Or am, on this occasion criminal.

The only boon I dare to challenge of thee  
Is to be spared th' unworthy name of traitor.

*Phi.* A noble pride breathes in thy every word.  
Ill canst thou, or shouldst thou, affect to do it,  
The lofty motives penetrate, or judge,  
That influence thy being.

. . . . .

'T is time, I warn thee,  
T' assume a new deportment. Thou hast sought  
Pity from me, and pity shalt thou find;  
But for thyself: all are not worthy of it.  
Leave me to be sole judge of my own measures.  
Erewhile in thy behalf, and not in vain,  
The queen at length addressed me. Of my love,  
No less than of her own, she deems thee worthy. . . .  
To her, more than to me, thou owest thy pardon. . . .  
To her. From this day forward I expect  
That thou wilt better know both how to prize  
And how deserve my favor.—Now behold,  
By thy solicitations I am won,  
O queen; and, urged by thee, consent to learn  
Not only to forgive, but *love* my son.

. . . . .

Let this for once suffice; weigh well my words.  
Do thou, O queen, withdraw to thy apartments;

Thou shalt, ere long, behold me there. Meanwhile  
I must bestow on other weighty cares  
A few brief moments.

[*Exeunt Isabella and Carlos. Gomez appears.*]

*Phi.* Heardst thou?

*Gom.* I heard.

*Phi.* Saw'st thou?

*Gom.* I saw.

*Phi.* Oh, rage!

Then the suspicion—

*Gom.* Now is certainty.

*Phi.* And Philip yet is unavenged!

*Gom.* Reflect.

*Phi.* I have reflected. Follow thou my footsteps.

This terribly concise question and answer has always been considered very powerful; it is taken bodily out of Metastasio!

In "Mary Stewart," Alfieri again stands in comparison with Schiller, but is much inferior. The moment chosen is that of Darnley's murder. His weak character is well drawn, and those of Bothwell and Mary have much force. But the most singular personage is one called La Morre, a name evidently made out of the Regent Murray, but apparently meant for a picture of John Knox, whose name no Italian could possibly pronounce. He is simply a fanatical preacher who delivers a striking prophecy of the execution of Charles I.

*Mur.* But what new sight? Oh gloomy scene!  
Around a dismal scaffold I behold  
Sable and sanguinary ornaments!

And who is this preparing to ascend it?  
 Oh! Art thou she? Dost thou, so proud and dainty,  
 Bend to the cleaving axe thy lofty neck?  
 Another sceptred dame inflicts on thee  
 The mighty blow. The faithless blood spurts forth;  
 And lo, a thirsty spectre drinks it all  
 To the last drop! Ah, would the angry heavens  
 Be satisfied with this? But, comet-like,  
 Thou drawest after thee a fatal track;  
 A race of wretched, proud, and abject kings  
 Spring from the womb of the expiring lady.  
 The just and horribly avenging ire  
 Of heaven's Almighty Monarch runs transfused  
 E'en with their life-blood. .

*Ma.* . . Wretched that I am!

What light, oh minister of heaven, inspires thee?  
 Ah! cease. . ah! cease. . I die. .

*Mur.* Who calls me now?

In vain from my affrighted eyes wouldst thou  
 Chase this tremendous sight. . I see already  
 In the thick gloom the sceptred spectres throng.—  
 Oh, who art thou, that almost mak'st me shed  
 Tears of compassion? Ah, above thy head  
 The axe is lifted: now, alas, it falls.  
 I see thy sever'd and thy once-crown'd head  
 Roll'd in the dust! And art thou unavenged?  
 Alas! thou art: for thy distinguish'd head  
 Long had been due to a more ancient vengeance.  
 How many lesser royal shades I see  
 Fight, fear, retreat, discomfited, in turns!  
 Oh lineage, fatal as thou art to others,  
 Destructive to thyself! For thee the streams  
 Are dyed in blood. . And dost thou merit it?  
 Ah, fly thou, to contaminate no more  
 This region with thy footsteps: go, and seek,  
 E'en in the breast of ignominy seek,

Connatural refuge; with idolaters,  
Thy fit companions, herd; there drag along,  
The throne's disgrace, the laughing-stock of men,  
Scorn'd e'en in wretchedness, opprobrious days.

The plot of "Myrrha" is taken from Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Alfieri has therein achieved a wonderful *tour de force*. The story in Ovid is almost too revolting to read, and never could be put on the stage; Alfieri has given it propriety and pathos. Myrrha, the daughter of the king of Cyprus, is to marry the king of Epirus. Both her parents are devoted to their child, and so is her aged nurse. The bridegroom is confessedly all that a bride's heart can seek, and all the auspices seem favorable, except an uneasy consciousness in the heart of the mother that in times past she has offended Venus, the great Cyprian divinity, and that her favor is uncertain.

Surrounded by all these friends, and grateful for their love, Myrrha is evidently the victim of some terrible inward distress, which she persists in concealing. She agrees to the marriage, but only on condition that her husband shall take her instantly to his home, and that not even her old nurse shall go with her. Her distress is too patent, although its cause is inscrutable, to allow the cloud to be dispelled which hangs over every one. At length the marriage ceremony begins, in front of the statue of Venus; it is

rudely broken by terrible omens, showing the wrath of the goddess. Pirous, in the truest spirit of chivalry, renounces the union, but with no hope of surviving his grief; and Cinyras, in utter despair, insists on his daughter's relieving the cause which has brought on this curse; when she confesses, in what are her last words, that he, her own father, is loved by her as no other man ever can be.

The tragedy of "Saul" is generally considered Alfieri's masterpiece. Macaulay pronounces it the finest poem of the eighteenth century, and it is, no doubt, a grand conception. The scene is laid on Mount Gilboa, just before the last fatal battle of the king of Israel. David, an exile among the Philistines, is determined to try once more to save the monarch to whom he was once so dear, in spite of himself. He revisits the camp, where he is greeted by Jonathan and his faithful wife Michal. Everything has gone ill with Saul since David has left him, and he is now gloomy under a presage of defeat, from which the encouragements of his kinsman Abner, David's enemy, have little effect to rouse him. His children persuade him to see and hear his old servant, who kneels before him and puts his life at his disposal. Saul is inclined to listen, and to shake off the evil suspicions that cloud his mind, and finally consents to put David once more at the head of his armies. Ab-



ner apparently accepts David's authority, but is really plotting all the time to ruin him, as well as the priests who preserve the traditions of Samuel. He is only too well aided by Saul's own dark desire, the evil spirit of which the Bible speaks. This is for a moment subdued by David's harp and song, but rises again and again. Saul drives David from the camp, orders the death of the priest who has come to warn him, and when surprised by a sudden attack on his camp by the Philistines, goes to court death at their hands.

The characters are drawn with great delicacy and discrimination: the steadfastness of Michal and Jonathan to husband and friend is gently and firmly reconciled with duty to their father; David and Abner, though positive and uncompromising, are strictly human and credible; and the vacillation of the ill-starred king fighting with prejudice, fighting with treachery, eager to be reconciled yet mindful of wrong, all confused by the evil power that overshadows him, of which he is half conscious yet cannot shake off, a mind once vigorous, yet now,

Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh,  
is conceived in the very spirit of the Old Testament. It is another proof of the power that underlies the whole story of Israel, that this tragedy of "Saul" speaks to our hearts not only with far more power

than the unreal pageantries of Greece and Rome, but even than the Medici and Stewarts of comparatively modern times. Alfieri never put more heart and soul into anything.

*Sa.* Who thus restrains me? Who resists me thus?  
Who forces me to sit?

*Jon.* Father. . .

*Da.* Ah, thou  
Great God of Israel, do thou succor him:  
Thy servant kneels to thee, and prays for this.

*Sa.* I am bereft of peace: the sun, the earth,  
My children, and my power of thought, all, all  
Are taken from me! . . . Ah, unhappy Saul!  
Who doth console thee? Who is now the guide,  
The prop of my bewildered feebleness?  
Thy children are all mute; they scowl on thee.  
And of the doting and infirm old man  
They only wish the death: nothing attracts  
My children's wishes but the diadem,  
Whose weight thy hoary head but ill sustains.  
Wrest it at once: and at the same time sever  
From this now tremulous and decaying form  
Your father's palsied head. . Ah, wretched state!  
Better were death! I wish to die! . .

*Mi.* Oh, father!

We all desire thy life. We each of us  
Would die ourselves to rescue thee from death.

*Jon.* Now since in tears his fury is dissolved,  
Brother, do thou, to recompose his soul,  
Exert thy voice. So many times already  
Hast thou rapt him with thy celestial songs  
In calm oblivion.

*Mi.* Yes; thou seest now  
The respiration in his panting breast  
Almost subsides: his eyeballs, late so fierce,

So hot and dry, swim in balsamic tears;  
Now is the time to lend him thy assistance.

*Da.* May God in mercy speak to him through me.

Omnipotent, eternal, infinite,

Thou who dost govern each created thing;  
Thou who from nothing mad'st me by thy might,  
Blest with a soul that dares to thee take wing;  
Thou who canst pierce the abyss of endless night,  
And all its mysteries into daylight bring,  
The universe doth tremble at thy nod,  
And sinners prostrate fall at the out-stretched arm of God.

Oft on the gorgeous blazing wings ere now

Of thousand cherubim wert thou reveal'd;

Oft did thy pure divinity endow

Thy people's shepherd in the martial field.

To him a stream of eloquence wert thou;

Thou wert his sword, his wisdom, and his shield.

From thy bright throne, O God, bestow one ray

To cleave the gathering clouds that intercept the day.

In tears and darkness we . . .

*Sa.* Hear I the voice

Of David? . . From a mortal lethargy

It seems to waken me, and to me displays

The cheering radiance of my early years.

*Da.* Who comes, who comes, unseen, yet heard?

A sable cloud of dust appear'd,

Driven by the eastern blast.—

But it is burst; and from its womb

A thousand brandish'd swords illume

The track through which it past.

Saul, as a tower, his forehead rears,

His head a flaming circlet wears;

The earth beneath his feet

Echoes with tramp of horse and men;  
 The sea, the sky, the hills, the plain,  
 The warlike sounds repeat.

In awful majesty doth Saul appear;  
 Horsemen and chariots from before him fly;  
 Chill'd by his presence is each heart with fear;  
 And godlike terrors lighten in his eye.

Ye sons of Ammon, late so proud,  
 Where is the scorn, the insults loud,  
 Ye raised against our host?  
 Your corses more than fill the plain;  
 The ample harvest of your slain  
 Invalidates your boast.

See what it is thus to depend  
 On gods unable to defend.—  
 But wherefore from afar  
 Hear I another trumpet sound?  
 'T is Saul's:—he levels with the ground  
 All Edom's sons of war.

*Sa.* This is the voice of my departed years,  
 That from the tomb to glory now recalls me.  
 I live again in my victorious youth  
 When I hear this. . What do I say? Alas! . .  
 Should cries of war be now addressed to me?  
 Oblivion, indolence, and peace invite  
 The old man to themselves.

*Da.* Let peace be sung.  
 Weary and thirsty, see he lies  
 Beside his native stream;  
 God's champion, whose past victories  
 Wake many a glorious dream.

The glossy laurel's evergreen  
 Doth screen his head from heat;  
 His children all around him seen,  
 His sighs and smiles repeat.

They weep and smile, then smile and weep,  
With sympathy endued;  
And still a strict accordance keep  
To every varying mood.

*Sa.* Happy the father of a race like this!  
Oh, peace of mind! . . . how precious are thy gifts  
To wretches like myself by thee deserted! . . .  
I feel ineffably through all my veins  
Balsamic dews of sweet composure steal. . .  
But what pretendest thou? To make Saul vile  
Amid domestic ease? Does valiant Saul  
Now lie an useless implement of war?

*Da.* The king reposes, but heroic dreams  
With fearful majesty before him glance,  
Pregnant with death and visionary themes.

Behold, transfix'd with his victorious lance,  
The conquer'd tyrant of the haughty foes;  
An awful shade in spectral gloom advance.

Behold a flash that instantaneous glows. .  
It is Saul's brandish'd sword, that no man spares,  
The weak and strong confounding with its blows.—

The terrible lion thus sometimes forbears  
To make the forest with his cries resound,  
For even he in sleep his strength repairs;

But not the silence of his den profound  
Can courage to the afflicted flocks restore;  
Or make the swain with less fear look around,  
For well he knows that he will prowl once more.

The monarch is roused from his slumbers;  
Arms! arms! he imperiously cries.  
They are vanish'd—the enemies numbers;  
What champion his valors defies?

Long, long have I pursued his ardent path;  
 Now it behoves me once more to pursue  
 His foes on earth; with heaven-directed wrath  
 To trample down and crush Philistia's crew;  
 And, with the assistance of the God of hosts,  
 Prove that, as he, so I maintain his laws;  
 And prove that now the camp of Israel boasts  
 Two swords resistless in a righteous cause.

*Sa.* Who, who thus boasts? Is there, except my sword,  
 Which I unsheathe, another in the camp?  
 He 's a blasphemer; let him perish, he  
 Who dares defy it.

*Mi.* Ah, forbear! Oh, heaven!

*Jon.* Father, what wouldst thou do?

*Da.* Unhappy king!

*Mi.* Ah, fly! . . . Ah, fly! With difficulty we  
 From violence restrain him.

*Mi.* Stop! oh, stop! Beloved father!

*Jon.* I beseech thee, stop!

*Sa.* Who thus restrains me? Who presumes to do it? . .  
 Where is my sword? Restore my sword at once. . .

*Jan.* Do thou retire with us, beloved father;  
 I shall not suffer thee to advance a step.  
 Behold, thy children now are all alone;  
 Return with us to thy pavilion; now  
 Thou needest quietness. Ah, come! . . . Refrain  
 From causeless rage; thy children stand around thee.

*Mi.* And they shall never, never quit thy presence.

Alfieri, then, will stand as one of the greatest Italian names, worthy to rank with the four poets, great in what he did, perhaps even greater by what he made Italians see they might do.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PARINI—MANZONI—LEOPARDI—SUMMARY

ALTHOUGH the part of Alfieri in the regeneration of Italian poetry was the boldest, the most deliberate, and the most original, it did not comprehend the entire work. The Italian critics of the present day are disposed to assign an effective share to Giuseppe Parini who, if we consider dates alone, should have come before Alfieri.

Parini was born in Bosisio, an obscure town of the Milanese, on the 22d of May, 1729. He was a man of the people, and rather boasted of his comparatively humble origin. His father hoped to make a priest of him, and the youth earned his living at first by copying legal papers, though he early took to studying the great masters of poetry, and a volume of his early poems admitted him into more than one of the literary academies. But he had to struggle with hard poverty all his life, and engaged in work as a private tutor to support himself and his mother. At every leisure moment he labored on what he intended should be his

great work, a satire which he called "Il Giorno," or "The Day," which he published in parts. He attracted the favorable notice of the Austrian minister in Lombardy, who encouraged his writing and ultimately obtained for him some important positions as Professor of Literature, where his lectures bore worthy fruit. He joined a so-called patriotic society, which engaged him to write the funeral eulogy of the Empress Maria Theresa. This delicate and difficult task, for which he had no liking, told on his nerves and his whole health. He was subject, from early youth, to a chronic weakness of the muscles, which ended by almost wholly depriving him of the use of his limbs; and his poetic vein flowed by no means as easily towards the end of his life. The intense bitterness of his satire inevitably raised him enemies, who nearly succeeded, on the death of his patron, in taking away his professorship. The premature reforms of Joseph II drew his attention to politics, and he was one of those who hailed the star of the French Revolution. On the arrival of the French in Milan, he was placed on the magistracy of the city, and worked in this post as well as a half-blind and half-lame man of nearly seventy might do: but he died poor, on the 15th of August, 1799.

The chief work of Parini is his satire of "The Day" in three parts, "Morning," "Noon," and "Evening."



It is conceived precisely in the temper of the Roman satirist Persius, and is a bitter piece of irony, arraiging the worthless young nobility of Milan—their indolence, their frivolity, their effeminacy, their surrender to the cook, the barber, and the dancing-master. It is in the form of a diary, or rather of ironical advice to a young nobleman how best to fill up his day with selfish and sensual pleasure. The stifled wrath of the man of the people against aristocratic superciliousness lurks under it all, and often breaks out much in the style of Burns. It was undoubtedly essential, if Italian poetry was ever to be healthy, that the unhealthiness of Italian society should be exhibited, nay, let us rather say, gibbeted; just as it was expedient for Zola to show up the Second Empire in the “*Rougon-Macquart*” series; and I do not believe it is right to dispute the moral purpose of either Zola or Parini. Yet there is the same objectionable feature in both as in their predecessor Persius—a disposition to bring out the purely unpleasant features of their subject. It may be said that if there is disease it must be handled as disease; but morbid anatomy is at best a revolting study.

From the second part of “*Il Giorno*”:

But now from hall to hall reëchoes loud  
Thy name, my lord; already it is heard  
Down in the kitchens, where laborious art

Applies itself to wake the fleeting sense  
Of tender palates, softly rouse the chords,  
And various pleasures with itself convey  
To the soul's very core. In white array  
There hasten to complete the noble work  
Its valiant ministers; a mighty mind  
Dictates their laws, an offspring of the land  
Wherein Colbert and Richelieu were renowned.  
Perhaps with equal splendor on his brow  
Near to the ships whence Ilion blazed and fell  
The great Achilles for his famous guests  
Designed the supper, and with him, the while  
The meats were cooking o'er the gentle fires,  
The trusty Patroclus, and charioteer  
Automedon. O thou sagacious chief  
Of tricks upon the palate, soon thy praise  
From the high table thou wilt hear resound;  
Who is there that shall dare to find a blot  
Upon thy work? The master will arise  
As champion of thy glory; woe to those  
Hunters of banquets who shall dare to speak  
A word against thee; for at burning noon  
Henceforth they 'll wander all the city round,  
Wretched and faint; and never more shall find  
A host to people with their mouths his meals.

When Alfieri died, however, there was a strong feeling, which lasted long, that his true successor, the veritable regenerator of Italian poetry, was Vincenzo Monti. He was born in the Romagna near Ferrara in 1754. He was sent to the University of Ferrara, and developed such fondness for literature and poetry that he gave up his life to them entirely. Cardinal Borghese took him to Rome and introduced him to

Cardinal Braschi, the nephew of Pope Pius VI. He was admitted to the academy called Arcadia, where he showed a disposition to satire and a dislike of criticism by no means acceptable to his coadjutors. He was a very devoted student and admirer of Dante, and tried to form a style on his, adopting his metrical form and many of his images; but the likeness is superficial. Alfieri was at this time winning his first tragic successes, and Monti brought out a drama called "Aristodemus," in which was to be all Alfieri's life and force with greater elegance of style. Byron has coupled it with Alfieri's plays, but Byron's taste in the drama was, to say the least, singular. The "Aristodemus" has a plot that revolted everybody, and I fail to find in it any compensating attraction. Monti followed it up with "Galeotto Manfredi," and subsequently with "Caius Gracchus," both in imitation of Alfieri, but they have little force.

About this time Basseville, the Girondist ambassador at Rome, was assassinated in the streets, and Monti poured himself forth in a poem in which all the horrors of the ultra-Catholics and Legitimists against the French Convention was displayed in what was supposed to be the true style of Dante. He retained this tone for some years, till, on the advent of Napoleon, he discovered that here was to be the deliverer of Italy; and the same pen that had compared Lewis

XVI to the Savior of the world was employed to extol Bonaparte as the savior of the Italians. Monti was employed in the service of the Cisalpine Republic, and Bonaparte, hearing one of his poems in honor of revolutionary liberty, declared him a mighty genius. If Byron's taste was eccentric, Napoleon's was null: a man who could find good poetry in the French translation of Ossian has no claim to be called a critic at all. Monti continued to exalt Bonaparte through his career, but interrupted his court poetry to prepare a translation of Homer, admitting he knew no Greek. After Napoleon's fall, he composed two poems in praise of the imperial house of Austria, and lived on, a voluminous and controversial bookman, till 1828.

Such a time-serving writer, that has a lyre at the service of any master, has no claim to respect for his character. But as to his poetry, I can see little to respect either. He has been extolled as the regenerator of Italian song, the sublimest writer since Dante, the last of the classicists; and a classicist he is with a vengeance! His poetry is simply a cento of ideas and verses from every writer of repute. In his three tragedies, which are none of them long, I have counted fifteen downright and pure thefts: four from Virgil, one from Racine, one right out of Alfieri, and eight unmistakably from Shakespeare; all these on rapid reading, not close study at all. It is the same in

his poems. Classical allusions from history and legend are piled upon modern characters till all sense of dates is lost. Then everything is exaggerated. Pope Pius VI, on his journey to Vienna, is a heaven-led pilgrim, for whose sake the storms disperse, the field puts forth new flowers, and the sun sets in new splendor. The shade of Basseville is told that it cannot rest till, by way of punishment, it has witnessed all the horrors of the Reign of Terror. An angel takes it to Paris, and the air becomes loaded with seraphs and the earth with demons. Nothing is described except through a false medium, more like the transformation scenes in an old-fashioned spectacular melodrama than anything that ever appeared on earth. The contrast with Dante, who gives his fiends and angels all the reality of men and women, or with Milton, who creates a supernatural world of his own, where special laws of being are invoked, is painful; for Monti, by piling on epithets and images, evolves, in 1793, a mixed race of devilish and angelic men, conversing with unreal and inconceivable angels.

The verse is easy and not deficient in force; but good verse-writing was as much a trick in Italy in the latter half of the eighteenth century as it was in England, and for all Monti's devotion to Dante, he is constantly under the sway of Petrarch. As a favorable specimen, I take a short description of the actual

state of Paris under the Reign of Terror, in which, laying aside for a few lines his machinery, as Pope and Addison called it, he gives us a touch of human feeling; but the *terza-rima* is hard to reproduce:

The angel with the shade, unseen and still,  
Entered the city, where all evil dwells.  
Onward he held his course, depressed and ill  
At ease in all his looks; his holy rays  
From time to time a secret tear would fill.  
To right the shade beheld with deep amaze  
His guide thus mournful, and the streets o'ercome  
With dismal silence met his left-hand gaze.  
Dumb was the sacred sound of bells, and dumb  
The labor of the day; the hissing saws  
And the rough anvils uttered not their hum;  
Only through all a murmur, and a pause  
Of fright, and questioning, and looks askance,  
Sadness that gripped the heart with leaden claws,  
Dull voices of confused significance;  
Voices of tender mothers, as they pressed  
Closely their guileless babes, with timid glance,—  
Voices of wives, who, seeking to arrest  
Their eager husbands', in the doors kept place,  
Blocking, with tears and sighs that rent their breast.  
But tenderness and care for woman's grace  
Were conquered by a fiend of greater might,  
Which tore each husband from his wife's embrace.  
For whirling in a fierce and loathsome flight  
There danced incessantly from door to door  
Phantoms, whose bloody aspect chilled the sight—  
Phantoms, the Druids' awful guise that bore  
Goaded in fierceness by the ancient thirst  
Of nameless sacrifice to drink the gore.

Perhaps the first man who really broke the yoke of the classical allegiance, though even he still draws too

much from ancient sources, was Ugo Foscolo. He was a Venetian, born in the island of Zante in 1778. He early embraced the principles of the French Revolution, and believed, as Monti said he did, that Napoleon was to regenerate Italy; but his enthusiasm had a cruel shock when, in 1797, Venice was handed over to Austria. Shortly after, he wrote a romance called the "Last Letters of Ortis," which attracted much attention; it partly foreshadows Foscolo's own history, the hero being a young patriot who, in bitter disappointment, commits suicide, an action which was too often in Foscolo's mind. He did not, however, entirely renounce hope from the French, serving in their army and being taken prisoner at Genoa. When Marengo put a wholly new face on matters, Foscolo was one delegate from northern Italy to present plans to Napoleon for the regulation of the country; but his plan was much too bold and free to suit Bonaparte. He afterwards was made lecturer on philosophy and literature in the University of Pavia, and here again the liberalism of his views made him suspected and led to the suppression of that professorship in all the Italian universities. Throughout these years he wrote much prose and poetry, elegies and dramas. They are all of the so-called romantic school,—a breaking away from antique models and an adoption of new lines of thought and new forces of expression, according to feelings and principles which had been germinating

all through the eighteenth century, and broke out towards its close.

Foscolo changed his residence more than once from Tuscany to Milan and elsewhere, and at last, when Napoleon was finally off the stage, and liberal opinions were hopelessly out of favor on the Continent, took up his abode in England. Here he was well received in the most cultivated society, and wrote much in the reviews of the literary history of Italy. He was not, however, altogether suited to English life: he was improvident in his poverty and was imprisoned for debt; the ways of an Italian radical were not the ways of most English literary men, and it may be doubted if he did not wear out his welcome before his death, which happened in 1827. Many years after, his remains were laid in Santa Croce. His most striking poems are his "Carme dei Sepolcri"—reflections somewhat in the style of Gray's "Elegy," but with a deeper feeling, and expressing, in a very striking way, the yearnings of an Italian in the days when the hope of seeing his country's deliverance had been so lively and so tenderly frustrated.

To glorious deeds, O friend, the gallant soul  
The urns of heroes fire, and beautiful  
And holy to the pilgrim make the land  
That holds them. When I view the monument  
Where lies the body of that mighty man  
Who, as the ruler's sceptre he controlled,



Stripped it of laurels, and laid bare to men  
What tears are dropping from it, and what blood,—  
And his funereal chest, who reared in Rome  
To God a new Olympus; his who saw  
Under the heavenly cope new worlds revolve  
And motionless the sun enlighten them,  
And first unlocked the firmamental road  
Where England's eagle spread its bolder flight,—  
Fortunate land, I cried, for those blest airs  
That breed new life, and for the streams of joy  
That Apennine pours to thee from its heights!  
Glad of thine air the moon her mantle throws  
Of purest lustre over all thy hills  
Feasting in time of vintage, and thy vales,  
Peopled with cottages and olive-groves,  
Send incense from a thousand flowers to heaven;  
Thou, Florence, first didst hear the song that soothed  
The anger of the exiled Ghibelline;  
And thou didst give the parents and the tongue  
To those sweet lips, the very Muse's own,  
That o'er the naked Love of Greece and Rome  
Casting in modesty a snow-white veil  
Back to the arms of heavenly Venus gave.  
But happier yet that gathered in one shrine  
Italia's peerless glories thou dost keep.

A more attractive, if not more interesting, character is Alessandro Manzoni, for long years the patriarch of Italian literature, and one who, in life and in death, achieved about as enviable a reputation as ever falls to the lot of man. He was born in 1784, in the neighborhood of Milan, the descendant of a family whose disposition led to their being compared in a proverb of the neighborhood to a mountain torrent.

His mother was a daughter of Beccaria, the illustrious economist and, to use a horrible modern word, neither Greek nor Latin, penologist. Manzoni is said to have been a dunce at school, but as this is often asserted, without the faintest basis, about Sir Walter Scott, whom Manzoni in many ways resembled, I am tempted to deny it of him also. After the death of his father, his mother went to live in France, and he followed her to Auteuil, near Paris, where he saw much of a set of young thinkers who called themselves idealogues—men who had shaken off the conventions of the centuries and were aiming to reconstruct the world on theory. Their views, however, did not seem to have held Manzoni in any strong grasp.

In 1808 he married the daughter of a Genevese banker named Blondel, with whom he obtained considerable property, and in particular a country seat, where he passed most of his later life. At this time he wrote much in the form of hymns. A devout Catholic he always was, in the days when many prominent men were shaking off their allegiance to the Church. In 1819 he wrote a tragedy on the career of Carmagnola, a condottiere of the Middle Ages; and later another called “*Adelchi*,” on the war of the Lombards with Charlemagne. These very remarkable plays struck directly at the theory of the unities, which

had tied down all the Italian tragedians from Tasso and earlier to Monti and Alfieri. Manzoni follows the lead of the Elizabethan dramatists, and also of Schiller, extending his scenes over such distances and spaces as he thinks the full development of the plot demands. He added to his plays an excellent essay on dramatic poetry, demonstrating the fantastic scheme of the unities for all sensible people. The death of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1821 stirred Europe profoundly, and Manzoni celebrated it in an ode entitled "The Fifth of May," which became, as it deserved, extremely popular. It is remarkable for dignity of thought and feeling, and the impartial and philosophic view of Napoleon's character, though crediting him at the last with more religious sentiment than he really felt. In 1827, after long preparation, Manzoni issued, in successive volumes, his great work, "I Promessi Sposi." This was an attempt to create in Italian the historical romance of the type of the Waverley Novels with which Scott was then charming the world. As far as Manzoni's own work went, it was most successful; the novel is one of the noblest works ever written. The scene is laid in and near Milan at the time of one of the great pestilences; and the descriptions of the country, the variety and play of the characters, the unbroken interest of the plot, have rarely been equalled; but no

successor of equal force has appeared in the language. After this achievement Manzoni lived nearly fifty years, chiefly occupied with religious duties and writing little. He lost successively his first wife, her successor, and all his children, but invariably showed himself cheerful and courteous to the many pilgrims who came to see the veteran of literature. At length his death, at the age of eighty-eight, in 1873, was a cause of general mourning throughout Italy, and Manzoni received a magnificent funeral, for which Verdi composed the requiem, honors most due to one who had enriched his native literature with works of the highest value, and never disgraced his genius or his fame with a base act or thought.

I give a paraphrase of a part of his ode by the late Hon. Alexander H. Everett. It is modelled on Byron's ode to Napoleon. You see we are approaching our own time—Manzoni died about thirty years ago. But his poetical work had been done more than fifty years earlier yet, and he belongs, as a writer, to the generation of our elders,—Scott and Shelley and Byron.

He too reposes from his toil:

The giant mind has fled;

And motionless the mortal coil

Upon the earth is laid.

Methinks that, at a blow so rude,

Earth's self a moment must have stood,

As motionless and mute,

Reflecting on the fatal hour  
Of him who swayed so vast a power,  
And doubting if the foot  
Of one so great would ever place  
Its track again upon her face.

I saw him, thron'd in glory, reign  
In his refulgent hall:  
I saw him sink,—ascend again,—  
And then forever fall.  
I flatter'd not his hour of state,  
Nor meanly mock'd his adverse fate:  
But o'er his funeral urn  
I come to chant a mournful song,  
On which, perhaps, the curious throng  
A passing glance may turn,  
When future centuries shall cast  
Their eyes on the recorded Past.

From Egypt's flood to St. Bernard,  
From Madrid to the Don,  
His crashing thunderbolts were heard,  
His lightning terrors shone.  
From North to South, from sea to sea,  
His very name was victory.

Was this the true renown?  
Let other times the question scan!  
We humbly bow before the plan  
Of that Most Holy One,  
Who deign'd so copiously to shower  
Upon his head the gift of power.

The joy of wild Ambition's dream,  
Its inly-gnawing care,  
Were his; and his the last extreme  
Of good and ill to share;  
Success, by danger made more sweet,  
Dominion, glory, base defeat,

The palace and the jail;  
Twice master of the subject world,  
And twice in fury headlong hurl'd  
From that proud pinnacle  
By fortune's whelming thundergust,  
To grovel in the common dust.

Two worlds—the men of Yesterday  
And of To-morrow—stood,  
Engag'd for years in furious fray,  
Drench'd in each other's blood.  
He wav'd his hand, and all was peace;  
He bade the stern contention cease,  
And then he passed away:  
But still in ruin always great,  
The mark of boundless love and hate  
And reverence and dismay  
And pity;—on his distant rock  
Mankind's perpetual gazing-stock.

There are reasons for not carrying our review into the poetry of our own contemporaries, and one is my wish to close these lectures with the name of one of the very most striking geniuses in all the long line I traverse. I said at the outset that Petrarch had fixed the form and tone of Italian poetry, and that almost every one of his successors had been content to keep within his lines, except a few who looked back to the still older inspiration of Dante. As we take up one Italian poet after another, we find, even in such vigorous writers as Filicaja, as Alfieri, echoes of the same conventionalities. It was not till the eighteenth century was hard upon its close that Italy gave birth

to a poet of whom every line and thought savors of underived genius,—as entirely and purely himself as Dante or Petrarch, more so than Ariosto or Tasso, perhaps even than Alfieri, and who spoke out his wondrous mind under a load of sorrow and gloom that neither Dante nor Tasso ever knew—Giacomo Leopardi.

Leopardi was born at Recanati, a trifling town in the Bolognese district, on the 29th of June, 1798. His family was noble, but reduced in fortunes. The task of restoring these fell entirely upon his mother, a woman of Spartan energy, with but little sympathy or tenderness. His father was a mere bookworm, living in his library and withdrawn from the world that he did not understand. The boy's brother and sisters were kind to him, but he found little pleasure in their society, and none at all in his dull native town. He lived, like his father, among books, studying all the time, and making unheard-of progress. He taught himself Latin with scarcely any help, and Greek with none,—not superficially, but profoundly,—and before attaining full manhood could have had no superior in classical scholarship in Italy. Always sickly and nervous, his confinement to his study, which there seems to have been no one to watch, resulted in absolute and incurable deformity, causing a blight over his whole life. At eighteen he wrote a remark-

able poem on the Approach of Death, a theme like one of Petrarch's, but with no sign of imitation. In 1819 he wrote and published two odes, expressing the deep distress of all his countrymen at the sad position in which Italy found herself with the despots restored and all her hopes of freedom blasted. No lyrics so powerful had been written since Filicaja, one should rather say since Petrarch. Writing in strictly classical Tuscan, Leopardi had struck out an absolutely new style, to which no poet of the time, save Shelley, offers any parallel. But his father, wedded to old ideas, had small sympathy for his gifted and suffering son. He, however, made the acquaintance of Giordani, a distinguished scholar and writer, and derived great comfort from it. His father at last gave his reluctant consent to his visiting Rome, though he made a difficulty about giving him the most modest allowance. Indeed, more was beyond his own means.

At Rome Leopardi became acquainted with the great scholars Niebuhr and Bunsen, the former of whom offered him a German professorship; but it is doubtful if he would have done well to accept it. The feeble stuff called scholarship at Rome repelled him, and he returned to Recanati, having no money to live elsewhere, and passed at home some unhappy years. At length a publisher in Milan gave him work as an editor, and he made Bologna his headquarters,



where he published certain philosophical works. In 1829 he returned to his uncongenial home, and soon after made the acquaintance of a Swiss scholar named Sinner, who proved his right to the name, for, having engaged to secure a wider diffusion of Leopardi's writings, he was inexcusably dilatory. Soon afterwards he published more poems, which, like all he wrote, received the warmest applause. An unhappy attachment, of which little is known, drove him to Rome, and he afterwards drifted to Florence, where he formed a new and considerate friend in Ranieri, with whom he passed the last few years of his life in Naples. During these he wrote a tremendous satire on his country's foreign tyrants, purporting to be a continuation of the Homeric "Frogs and Mice," somewhat in the style of Casti, but far bolder and more direct. But the feeble frame was worn out, and he died on the 15th of June, 1837.

The poems of Leopardi make but a small volume, which, before the recent discovery of his first poem entire, was smaller still. Of his literary style it is much easier to speak in general terms of interest and praise than to describe it clearly to one who has not read him. After going through that long line from Petrarch to Manzoni, going back, if you will, to Dante, the very first juvenile poem in the collection, a mere fragment of a recently discovered whole, strikes one

—at least it struck me—with a new sensation. It is very far from what we call sensational; it is entirely classical in form; it has none of Coleridge's deliberate eccentricity or Wordsworth's baldness; it is clearly written by a student as well as a countryman of Dante and Petrarch. But it sounds, so to speak, a string in their lyre that they had overlooked; an Italian will understand me if I say it is as if one of the unredeemed provinces had been reclaimed to the Italian nation; and although only the first of Leopardi's poems that one happens to read will produce the same electric quiver, none of them will weaken the feeling. He is all original, like a man who walks into an ancient forest where all sorts of trees have been cut for centuries, and who, with apparently no effort, lays his hand on a stock and brings up from the ground a scion of a new species of oak or elm never known in that woodland before, and obviously, in strength, beauty, and value, at least equal to the best of the old.

To know the native strength of Italian—its stores of reserved power never wholly revealed even to Dante or Alfieri, and scarcely imagined by Petrarch, Ariosto, or Tasso—one must go to Leopardi. To say that he is modern, that he belongs to the nineteenth century, is true enough; but it might suggest false comparisons. "Locksley Hall" and "Maud" are avowedly modern; the "Idylls of the King" give modern

thoughts in a legendary disguise: but Leopardi writes in his century as Dante and Petrarch wrote in theirs; he is, like them, a pilgrim of eternity, who touched earth between 1798 and 1837. Many readers would notice his close descriptions of natural scenery and his discussion of his own feelings, in complete contrast to a poet like Ariosto, who is all absorbed in his Paladins and their imaginary world. Yet Leopardi's descriptions have nothing in common with the landscapes of "The Lady of the Lake," and but little with those of the "Excursion"; he neither forgets himself in his scenery nor seeks to make himself a part of it. But they bear a strong resemblance to the few powerful pictures of nature in the "Prometheus," and still more to "Manfred," which affected men so powerfully in Leopardi's early manhood.

There are, indeed, many curious points of resemblance between him and Byron: their noble birth, their poverty, their want of appreciation at home, their deformity, their restless change of abode, their unfortunate attachments, their sympathy with the cause of liberty and loathing of Austrian oppression,—it is particularly to be noticed that Byron's coöperation with the Italian Carbonari was given not far from Leopardi's home,—their comparatively early deaths, and their philosophy of life, so prominent in all their works. This is not the place to dis-

cuss either the poetry or the opinions of Byron. My own view is that he was a better poet and a worse man than it is now the fashion to esteem him. But Leopardi's philosophy is entwined with all his poetry, and is, indeed, a grim spectacle. He looks upon the outside world and himself as all part of one system, where, slightly to change Heber's words, "every prospect pleases and only man is wretched"; all other created beings, birds or animals, work out a destiny acceptable to them, and as long as it runs they enjoy it. Our race alone longs for pleasure, sympathy, and happiness, and cannot find them. In Burns's words, "Man was made to mourn"; but it is worse: he must see all around him content, and he alone systematically deprived of the pleasure which his nature naturally craves.

This awful pessimism was no doubt largely the product of Leopardi's wretched constitution and the worse than misunderstanding of those nearest him, whom yet he declares he loved, in the most elaborate phrases of Italian conventionality, though he resented any such explanation. But it seems to me equally certain that the state of Italy helped to produce it. Leopardi felt himself in the universe what his country was among the nations. They had nearly all either greatness, or wealth, or happiness, or contentment—at least existence; Italy, with every right to all these,

had not one. Could Leopardi have lived for twenty years longer—and he would not, in 1862, have been a very old man—and seen Italy freed from her chains, risen high in fact, rising higher in hope, the sight might have brought blood even into his cheeks, fire to his eye, and cheer to his heart; and he might have felt Manzoni's faith to be no falsehood.

From Sir Theodore Martin's translation of *Il Sabato del Villaggio*:\*

The sun is sinking in the west,  
And from the fields the village lass  
Comes, with across her shoulder thrown  
Her sheaf of grass,  
And in her hand a posy rare  
Of violets and roses,  
Wherewith to-morrow she—such is her wont—proposes  
To deck withal her bosom and her hair.

The old crone, with her gossips round,  
Sits spinning on her steps before her door,  
And prattles in the waning light  
Of the good times of yore,—  
How she on gala days was drest  
As smartly as the best,  
And how, when she was strong and slight  
And lissome, she would dance all night,  
And young and handsome fellows had  
For partners by the score.

The sky turns azure blue;  
Up comes the moon, and in her light  
The shadows hills and houses threw  
Are turned to silvery white.  
And now the vesper-bell proclaims  
The day of rest is near,

\* "Blackwood's Magazine," December, 1903.

And to men's hearts, you 'd say, it brings  
A message of good cheer.  
Children to the village square  
With shouts come trooping in,  
And bounding, leaping, here and there,  
They make a merry din;  
And, whistling as he goes,  
The labourer to his scanty meal hies home,  
And of the morrow thinks, that brings to him repose.

And now, when all is darkness everywhere,  
And other sounds are still,  
Hark to the hammer's stroke, the hand-saw's shrill,  
As in his workshop, by the lamp's dim flare,  
The carpenter is working might and main to make  
A finish of his work before daybreak!

This is the welcomest day of all the seven,  
Brimful of hope and joy. To-morrow  
The hours will bring unrest and sorrow,  
And the accustomed toil and moil recall  
The thoughts that weigh so heavily on all.

Oh! merry, laughing boy,  
The time you now enjoy  
For thee is like one long delightful day  
Beneath a cloudless sky,  
Forerunner of a season rife  
With joys, to make a festival of life.  
Sport on, my lad! Thy present is a stage  
The cheeriest in life's pilgrimage.  
I would not have it otherwise with thee.  
But may life's festival, come when it may,  
Not on thy heart too great a burden lay!

## II Passero Solitario:

Above the summit of yon ancient tower,  
O solitary sparrow, to the plain  
Singing thou goest till the day shall die,

And o'er the valley strays thy harmony,  
While all around the spring  
Burns in the air, and revels o'er the fields,  
So that the heart grows tender at the view.  
I hear the bleating flocks, the lowing herds,  
And in their rival joy the other birds  
Weave in free air a thousand circles' maze  
In sheer rejoicing for their happiest hour.  
Thou, thoughtful and apart, on all dost gaze;  
No comrades and no flights,  
No joy concerns thee; shunning every play;  
Singing, while goes away  
Of time and of thy life the fairest flower.

Ah me! To thine how near  
Is all my habit; smile and gayety  
Of every new-born season of spring dear,  
And thee, of youthfulness the brother, Love,  
The bitter sigh of days long past and gone,  
I reckon not, know not why; rather from these  
I take my flight afar  
An anchorite, and strange  
To my own native soil  
I pass away the springtime of my life.

Upon this day, that yieldeth now to eve,  
Our burghers went to hold a holiday;  
Through the calm air a sound of bells I hear;  
I hear the iron barrel's thunder oft,  
That sends its echoes far from farm to farm;  
In festive garments clad  
The youth of all the town  
Their dwellings leave, and pour through all the streets:  
See, and are seen, and in their hearts are gay.  
I to this distant spot  
Far from the village bend my steps alone,  
Every delight and joy  
Put off to other times; the while my eyes  
Strike through the genial air

'Twixt the far hills the sun's departing rays;  
As past the day serene  
He lingers as he sets, and seems to say  
The blissful time of youth is vanishing.

Thou lonely bird! When thou shalt reach the eve  
Of whatsoever life thy stars allow  
Surely wilt never grieve  
For this life spent; for all thou hast desired  
Of Nature's self was born.  
For me, if of old age  
The ever-hated floor  
To tread I may not shun,  
When to another's heart these eyes are dumb  
And void the world without, each day to come  
More foul and dreary than the present hour,  
What will such wishes seem?  
What of these years of mine? What of myself?  
I shall repent and oft  
But comfortless my looks shall backward turn.

### From the Supplement to the *Batrachomyomachia*:

So great a hatred fires the stranger heart  
Of the Italian name, that from each blow,  
Which to themselves no glory can impart,  
Because 't was ours, they feel a joyous glow;  
Many the nations smit by fortune's dart,  
And sunk to baseness by protracted woe;  
But never country has example shown  
Of such infernal hatred as our own.

And this hath been, because although o'ercome  
Enslaved and torn she sits in misery  
Perforce in Italy hath fixed its home  
Whate'er of noblest nature hath in fee;  
And still the glory of eternal Rome  
Bids by its blaze all else in darkness be;



And still the Italian brand must Europe bear  
Who mocks at us with vain and haughty air.

Nor Rome alone; but Italy, of arms

Bereft, hath with her intellectual lore  
Tamed the barbarian, and with radiant charms

Returned to reign the nation's queen once more,  
And at the stranger clown, who dreads no harms,

But jeers at her oppressed by fortune sore,  
Long time she laughed, and every other land  
Seemed dreary exile to her children's band.

The strangers feel that all renown is nought

To that whereof is Italy the heir;

They feel that children's work alone hath wrought

Each race that with our greatness would compare,  
And see, unless each gift that heaven hath brought

Our mothers strangle when their babes they bear,  
Were Italy a moment now untied,  
In her third triumph o'er their necks she 'd ride.

The full sternness of Leopardi's pessimism must be studied in such poems as "La Ginestra," too long to translate entire, and too complete to bear selection. Their reading affords a sad pleasure; which, when the work of accurate version is attempted, becomes positive pain.

And with this very imperfect account of a very great poet, sad as our last notes must be, I feel it is expedient to bring these chapters to a close. The inspiration of the men discussed in this chapter has called forth many strains of brilliant and thoughtful poetry from Italians of our own day, among whom distinctly the most eminent is Joshua Carducci, who,

after thrilling all Italy with his powerful songs for long years, is even now sinking under the heavy stroke of disease.\* But the judgment of contemporaries on poets is a delicate and invidious task. I have brought you far enough to see that the muse of Italy is not yet dead, and that the beautiful land where is heard the sound of *si* will go on singing to centuries yet to be as she has to the centuries that have been. Before we turn away from the fascinating subject, are there some last words?

And first, I beg you notice the remarkable fact that almost all the great poets of Italy, from Dante to Leopardi, were what their land calls noble—the sons of ancient and powerful families. With but two exceptions, they cannot be called men of the people. We in America may regret the existence of privileged classes, especially when we consider the absurdity that Pulci and Berni, Tasso and Leopardi, should still be called noble when they had lost their money; but surely such a glorious body of poetry is a noble price to pay for noble names. Yet their songs have always been loved by the people. Dante and Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso, have always been loved by their humblest countrymen. Even so Cowper, Byron, Scott, and Shelley, all of whom Italy would call of noble birth, fail to speak to the universal heart.

\* Carducci died in the spring of 1904.

Again, these poets were all educated men. No doubt in the age of most of them education was limited and narrow; most of what was taught in the schools was neither edifying nor stimulating; but such as it was, they eagerly took it in, and their poems are a grand storehouse of such learning as their day could give. Many of them were trained to the law; and herein, if I am not mistaken, they found their precision, their freedom from cloudiness and vagueness, their coming straight to the real issue of their subject, which saves much of their poetry from being misty and perplexing. By their position and their legal training they were men of the world—men used to deal with other men and women, well-trained in human passions and experiences. In the present day, when all that is asked of a poet is to oblige nature to talk, and to turn everything into something else, this air of active life, of social exercise, of interest in men as men, may seem commonplace, but in due time the wheel will come round and people and critics will once more recognize that Homer set the true key for all poetry. Watch Nature in all her moods as you will—she is only the great palace in which the Father has set His children to dwell; and the real shadow and sunshine is in the words and hearts of men.

Once more—the Italian poets are devoted students of form. They never would have understood the notion

that the rhythm is nothing, or is the better for being unrhythmical; they would have scouted the absurdity of a "prose poem," or that the way to read poetry was to take all the music out of it. They, no doubt, in the course of time, came to sacrifice force, and even sense, to mere melody. But that does not hinder the melodies, the harmonies, nay, the symphonies, of those poets who have force and sense, from being an eternal possession of beauty, which in itself supplies a sense and force that none of the uncouth joltings and prancings of our modern Pegasus can give.

There is no question that the antique glories of Italian poetry were an oppression to her later poets. The central chord of Dante's great poem, that Virgil was to be his master and guide, whatever he may have meant by it, was literally true with his successors. Those successors never dreamed of thinking—as why should they?—that he and Horace, Ovid and Lucan, Lucretius and Juvenal, belonged to any land or any tongue but their own. They wrote in a little earlier form of the Roman dialect, and that was all. Hence, at every stage of their song, such masters as Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Filicaja, felt it a positive duty to follow "where Virgil, not where fancy, led the way," as much as Milton felt bound to follow the Gospels in "Paradise Regained," or the book of Judges in "Samson Agonistes." This ancient fame of Italian

verse was a collar of gold round her later sons' necks ; golden, but a fetter, and heavy.

But they were patriots ; they did love their native land. With scarcely an exception, with no exception of any importance, they did give to her the richest treasures of their verse, the deepest ponderings of their souls, the warmest feelings of their hearts. They rejoiced in all her triumphs, they rebuked all her sins, they wept over all her woes. Her rulers were often faithless and tyrannical ; her merchants were greedy and selfish ; her soldiers were mercenary and cowardly ; her priests were lazy and superstitious, nay, betrayed their country and their God in ways that may not be named ; her inspired artists turned their pencil and their chisel to bring out forms unworthy of their divine gift : but from first to last, when all these had failed, her poets struck from their lyres and pealed from their clarions strains

that might create a soul  
Under the ribs of death ;

and that country, maimed, despoiled, fettered, stifled, was not dead, as long as her life was perpetuated in their heavenly songs. And now that the chains are struck off ; now that she stands on her feet among her sisters ; now that, under Agrippa's dome, there rises in eternal honor, face to face with the urn of her celes-

tial artist, that of her patriot king; now that the diadem crowns her forehead, let every friend of beauty, of freedom, of truth, thank the Lord of all that is lovely, free, and true that in her darkest days he spared her to be the mother of Petrarch and Ariosto, of Tasso and Filicaja, of Alfieri and Leopardi—her laureate sons of glory.

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	Canto V, stanzas 25-28	150









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